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OR,

Mrs. Jingle's Suspicious Lodger.

BY JO PIERCE,

(Of the New York Detective Force.)

AUTHOR OF "FIVE POINTS PHIL," "BOB O' THE
BOWERY," "JEFF FLICKER," "TARTAR
TIM," "GAMIN BOB," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LOOKING FOR A SWINDLER.

"HULLO! what's the racket in that office,
Jakey?"

"Dere vas a ball-room a-dancin', maybe,
vasn't it?"

"Not much, my rotund frien'. Thar's a row
goin' on thar like a blizzard, an' somebody is
full o' mad up ter his chin. I'll bet a spavined

"HEY! JAKEY!" EXCLAIMED PETE. "HERE'S ROBBERY AN' 'SASSINATION. ARTER
THEM—ARLAR THEM LIKE MAD!"

hoss thar will be a fight. Le's go in an' see it, an' then I'll write it up fur the *Daily Smasher*."

"Dot vas right. We vill go in, but if you see anypody fire a bullet mit a revolver, you dells me before I see it so I dodge. Dot will please me, Pete."

"Hurry up, Jakey! They're at it, hot an' heavy!"

The scene was Houston street, at seven o'clock of a spring evening. The rattle and roar of New York's busy day-life had subsided to a marked degree, but, as is always the case, there were enough persons moving.

Among them were two boys of about fifteen years—the participators in the foregoing dialogue. They had heard angry voices and sounds of disturbance in an office on the south side of the street, and Pete, being of an inquisitive turn of mind, was anxious to see what was transpiring. There was nothing to prevent, for the door was open, and they hurried in. First of all was a hall, and then an office opened off of it.

It was in this office that the dispute was in progress.

Pete pressed forward. There were four persons in the office, and the boy's quick mind readily distinguished one as the business occupant thereof, and another as his employee. The remaining persons were a middle-aged man and a girl of about nine years. The man last mentioned was talking excitedly, alternately waving his left hand and shaking it at the proprietor, menacingly doubled up. With his right hand he held fast to the girl.

"You shall hear me!" he cried, in some sort of dialect. "To you I shall yield not at all, and my rights I demand. There is police to be had, and them will I call if you give me not back my money!"

"Hang you and your money!" was the equally angry retort. "I never saw either one before, and I don't see the money, now."

"Look you in your strong-box."

"Don't keep one."

"Where put you then my money?"

"I tell you I never saw your money."

"Ah! you to me a falsehood tell. My money I demand, for I am swindle, but submit I will not to wrong. The police I call, and justice, it will I get."

The proprietor turned to his employee.

"John, close the outside door. This disgraceful wrangle musn't be heard, and we can't throw out a girl. Hustle out those boys!"

This order referred to Pete and "Jakey," and the former's face grew long, but the excited foreigner came to his aid.

"Witnesses I demand," he asserted. "The young men, let them stay."

"All right, my hearty. Close the door, John."

The speaker was glad to have the witnesses limited to two poorly-dressed boys, if witnesses there must be; hence, his ready acquiescence in the foreigner's demand.

"That's the proper caper," quoth Pete, condescendingly. "We're glad ter oblige, an' we'll set on this hyar case with pleasure, takin' care that both sides git justice, or git equally cheated. I'm Pavement Pete, so called; an' this is my runnin' mate, Jakey Strauss."

"My name, it was Jan Jung," announced the man with the child.

"Ay, ay. We're all interdooced now but him."

Pete nodded toward the proprietor.

"My name is over the door," said the latter, stiffly. "If you can read, you'll find it to be Edmund Halpin."

"Ah! but once it was Daniel Markin!" cried Jung.

"That's a lie!" Halpin retorted, bluntly.

"Deny it not, for so it is."

"Have done with empty words!" ordered Halpin. "What I want is an explanation. You accuse me of robbing you of your money, and then put in some gibberish about Florida. I don't know what in blazes you are driving at, any way."

"To me you sell land in Florida," cried Jung, "and when there I go, no land can I find!"

"I sell you land in Florida?"

"That was it."

"It was not it. I never sold a foot of land to you, or any other person, in Florida or elsewhere."

The foreigner wrung his hands in grief.

"You deny it to break my heart, and the money keep you robbed me of!" he lamented.

"Did you really get swindled on a land speculation?"

"Is it not so? My word I have given."

"When was this?"

"Six months gone past."

"Where did you make the trade?"

"Was it not there?" and Jung pointed to another door.

"Do you mean in the rear office?"

"That is it."

"And this was six months ago?"

"Yes."

"My good man, you are barking up the wrong tree. I have occupied this office only two months, and before that I lived in New Haven, as I can readily prove. I have heard there was once a Florida land-office here, now I reflect; but I had no connection with it. You must go to the parties who run the place. I'm not in."

"Ah! but you are the man!" Jung asserted.

"I am not the man."

"Do you think me blind?"

"I should say you are as blind as a bat, and let me caution you not to be too flippant with charges. I don't want to do you injury, but when you make such charges you wake up my dander the worst way. Florida land! Julius Cæsar save me from ever selling, or buying it; I want no part of it. Now see here, my man, I see you are a foreigner—"

"I am from Amsterdam, Holland."

"Long over?"

"Five years—five bitter years!"

"And not cut your eye-teeth yet!" muttered Halpin. "As I was about to say, your being a foreigner gives me a fellow-feeling for you. Tell me about your adventure. Got swindled by land-agents, did you? My friend, there are heaps in just the same fix, but that don't solve your hurts for a cent!"

The speaker was recovering his calmness, and Jung took courage. He did not for a moment believe that he had got the wrong man, but he began to entertain hopes that he would have his precious money refunded.

"Sorry was my lot," he lamented.

"Tell me all about the case."

"To this country I came from the Netherlands, five years it was ago; and I buy a farm in Herkimer county. Hard I worked, but ill-luck was mine. Much sickness came, and my poor wife, she died. Then I get a letter from you, saying—"

"Hold right on!" directed Halpin. "You never got any letter from me. Who was it from?"

"Daniel Markin."

"That's better. Go on!"

"The letter say that you—that he have much land in Florida which he sell cheap, and now was my time a fine farm to get for a song—the letter say 'for a song,' but I was charged three hundred dollars, all the money I have got then."

"Go on!"

"Discouraged I was, so I sold my farm, and here I came, and in that room I see you—"

"Hold on! Saw whom?"

"Daniel Markin," meekly amended Jung.

"Go on!"

"And I buy what he say was one large, splendid farm in Florida. I pay all my money, and have only enough to go to Florida. Then take I my little daughter, and we go South. Ah! when we get there what do we find? There was no land! I have been swindled, they tell me. The land for which I pay exists not. I was in despair. I was puzzled one time, but they who live there make it plain—all too plain. I am taken in; Markin do it on purpose. He have no land, but he say he have and take of me my only money. Ah! pity me, gentlemen; pity me. In a land of strangers I was left with nothing!"

The Hollander's utterances had grown rapid and excited, but more than anything else, it was pathetic. As he talked he frequently moved his arms in wide circles, gesticulating wildly, and Pavement Pete, for one, felt for him keenly.

Plainly, the ignorant foreigner had fallen into the hands of one of the many sharpers with which New York abounds, and he had been swindled as an unwary person is liable to be.

"The people of Florida are good," added Jung, "and they give me money to get back North, and of you I ask the three hundred dollars I paid for the land I find not in Florida!"

He looked imploringly at Halpin, but the latter shook his head.

"It is clear that you have been swindled, but I am not responsible. Who constituted the bogus land-company I don't know, but your way is to apply to the police. I have doubts about it doing you any good. Such characters are birds of passage, and you can bet your last dollar that the land-concern terminated its shadowy existence before any victim had time to get back from Florida and confront them; but it is possi-

ble that your description may put the police on the trail. Go to the Central Station and see Inspector Byrnes at once."

Jung looked stupidly at his adviser.

"What you say?" he asked.

"Can't you understand?"

"All but what last you say."

"I'll go to Mulberry street, myself."

Halpin arose, but the Hollander interpreted it wrong.

"You shall not go!" he cried, excitedly. "You are all of one villain, I do declare!"

He had imagined that Halpin was trying to run away from him, and thus ruin his chances. Halpin naturally grew very angry at the words applied to him.

"John," he cried, "open the door!"

The employee obeyed.

"Now," Halpin added, turning to Jung, "get out of my office!"

"I will not go!" cried the miserable Hollander.

"John, put him out!"

The office-boy, who was a stout young man, instead of a boy, advanced at once to obey, but Jung as promptly raised a shout.

"Help!" he loudly cried. "Police! police!"

As chance would have it, the patrolman of that block was passing the door at the moment, and, as he was an alert man, he was at the office door in a moment more.

"Hallo! what's the racket here?" he demanded.

"You've come just in time, Bushley," answered Halpin. "Here's a thick-headed Dutchman—see if you can beat a little common-sense into his noddle."

"Sir, I have been robbed!" cried Jung, holding out both hands to the officer.

"Robbed of what?"

"My money; and he it is who have done it."

The speaker pointed to Halpin, who retorted in disgust:

"Still at it, ain't you? Bushley, you remember a land-office here, don't you?"

"There was some sort of a place in the rear office, last fall, when the Englishman had the front. I believe the party in the rear was named Markin, but I only knew him by sight."

"Would you know him now?"

"I think so."

"Am I he?"

"You! Certainly not."

"False! false!" cried Jung, wildly. "All men are in plot to rob me. I am among thieves, and to me all men do lie. Oh! the bad luck which is mine!"

CHAPTER II.

FROM BAD TO WORSE.

THE patrolman had flushed with anger at hearing his veracity questioned thus, but a new voice suddenly broke upon his ears.

"Don't git wrath, fur all this can be 'splained."

The officer wheeled, and saw a boy confronting him with a most serious face.

"Who the dickens are you?" demanded the guardian of the people.

"Peter Deane is my baptismal handle, but I don't hear it very frequent. Call me Pavement Pete, an' you will git as nigh the truth as is safe."

"Are you with this man?"

"Not a' tall. I'm a witness."

"These boys rushed in to hear what the racket was about," explained Halpin, "and I thought it well, considering how this madman was going on, to have witnesses; so I told them to stay. But what the boy has got to say I don't know."

"I offer my invallerble services as an expert," Pete seriously replied. "By trade, I'm a sifter o' secrets, an' I hev a nat'ral gift fur unraveling dark an' twisted threads. In the present case, ter wit, thar is either a case o' mistaken hidinty or else thar ain't; I'm not sure which. Be you, Jakey?"

"Nein!" replied Jakey.

"You dry up!" commanded the officer, shaking his club at Pete. "No more o' yer nonsense here, now."

In this light and airy fashion he disposed of Pete, and then turned to the men again.

"Now, then, I'll hear all about this," he announced.

He did hear; but Jung was a slow witness, and considerable time was consumed in listening to his roundabout, excited speeches. The patrolman got the facts, as far as the Hollander could explain, at least, and then he added:

"You've been taken in by an old dodge, but I must say I think you're on the wrong track."

Mr. Halpin, here, only took the office a short time ago, and he don't look like Markin."

"There were two men who the land-office ran," Jung eagerly said.

"There were?"

"Yes."

"I don't remember but one. He had red hair."

"Ah! he it was not that I mean; he was a clerk only. Daniel Markin was brown-haired, and this is the man."

He pointed toward Halpin, and was as stubborn as ever.

The patrolman hesitated. He believed that Jung was on the wrong scent, but as he could not prove it, he would not put his official position in jeopardy by taking a strong stand in the matter.

"One thing is certain," he observed, "you can't oblige Mr. Halpin to hand you over three hundred dollars until you prove that he's the man. He says he can prove that he was in New Haven during Markin's term here. You'll have to give him a chance."

"Ah! but how?"

"I presume he wouldn't object to your calling in a lawyer to look at his proofs."

Patrolman Bushley was as consistent as the majority of persons. It is very easy to advise others to employ a lawyer, and the graceful ease with which it is done to persons who cannot employ even a bootblack on one solitary occasion, is refreshing; but the giver of advice, in his own case, fights clear of the aforesaid lawyers.

"Naturally, Jung made answer that he had no money to pay a lawyer, but Halpin promptly added:

"There's an easier way of settling it. Meet me at Police Headquarters, Mulberry street, at nine o'clock in the morning. I'll have my proofs and you can have your story. I don't bear you any ill-will—only when you get 'sassy' and raise my mad—and I'm willing to help you out. Now, my man, it is time to close up here, and I positively will spend no more time."

Jung still looked anxious.

"But where you go?" he asked.

"Home."

"Where was that?"

"I don't know that I'm obliged to tell you all my business. Look in the Directory."

"What if you leave town this night?"

"Leave town?"

"Yes."

"Run away?"

"That was what I mean."

Halpin's "mad" was up again, to use his own expression.

"See here!" he exclaimed, "I've a good mind to punch you once, just for luck. I reckon you are an honest man, but you can manage to insult other honest men about as often as anybody I know. Hang it! am I going to run away and leave my business to escape a false charge?"

Jung moved uneasily and looked appealingly at the policeman, but that wise man prudently held his peace.

"Maybe, your way it is right," answered the Hollander.

"Now you talk sense. Well, shall we meet at Police Headquarters?"

"Ye-es."

"All right; and now, if you will all go out, I'll close up."

Pavement Pete nodded to Jakey, and they left the office. The former led the way until several yards had been placed between them and the other door. Then he paused, thrust his hands into his pockets and faced his companion.

"You see how 'tis, Jakey, don't yer? The snares o' the wicked are spread all 'round fur the feet o' the unwary. Now, don't you go an' pay three hundu'd dollars fur no orange-grove plantation until you've had a few samples o' the oranges ter test with yer teeth."

"Mine gracious! I ain't got t'ree hundu'd cents ter my name, Pete."

"I'm sorry. Ef you had, I'd like ter borry. I'm sorry fur that chap, anyhow, fur he's b'en swindled the wus't way. I'd like ter help him ef I could, but how's it ter be done? I don't b'lieve Halpin is the pirate that sold the orange-groves ter him."

"Dot vas a conundrum."

"Right you are, Jakey; your logic is as sound as ever. I dunno but one pusson who is sounder on logic than you, an' that is the esteemed Mrs. Jingle."

Jakey looked doubtfully at the speaker. Jakey was a slow-witted lad, and he was often

unable to understand the more rapid and eccentric flights of Pete's mind. The boys were a strong contrast in every way.

Pete was thin and slender, but muscular; Jakey was short and fat. Their faces were much like their bodies. Pete's was sharp, keen, bright and wide-awake; Jakey's was round as a full moon, and dull and vacant of expression. Some people wondered why the two were together so much, while others suspected that Pete got more fun than anything else out of the simple-minded lad's company.

Conversation between them ceased as the parties to the late discussion came out of the office. Halpin and his clerk walked briskly away; the policeman sauntered along his beat. But Jan Jung passed near the door, holding his daughter by the hand, and looked around with an expression of bewilderment.

"I'm sorry for him," quoth Pete, "an' ef I's a millionaire, I'd take him inter my mansion. Lost 'bout ev'ry cent he's got, I'm afeerd, an' hard up, an' most heart-broken. I'm sorry fur him, fur he ain't nowhar nigh sharp enough ter git along in this world. Funny way he's got o' speakin'—I never knowed a Hollander ter have his peccoliarities afore; but I s'pose ev'ry man has a right ter talk as he pleases, an' ef Jan Jung wants ter mix his words up like he does, why, let him go it!"

As he spoke the Hollander started along and walked away from the boys.

"Reckon I'll drop around here ter-morrer," pursued Pete, "an' find out how this affair winds up. Halpin will prob'ly prove his inner-cence, an' then the perlece will hustle 'round fur Daniel Markin. I'd like ter help 'em, fur I'm a sifter o' secrets, but the blue-jackets would say I wa'n't big enough. Bah! Allow me ter ask, Jakey, ef a man's brain depends in size on the size o' his body? I aver not. Why, my jolly colleague, that would—"

Pavement Pete stopped short. He had taken another look at Jung, who was by that time a block away, and what the boy saw held his attention fast.

A man had been moving rapidly after Jung, having evidently just come from some office, or doorway; and Pete saw him suddenly raise one hand with some object in it. Down came the hand, and the Hollander dropped to the sidewalk. Another moment and the unknown had caught up the little girl and was running away. A cab stood only a few paces distant; he hurried into it with his captive; the driver applied his whip to the horse, and the vehicle rolled away.

All this had been done with surprising rapidity, but Pete comprehended that Jung had been felled with a sand-bag, or some such weapon, and that the abductor had made his deed silent by placing his hand over the girl's mouth to prevent any outcry.

"Hey! Jakey!" exclaimed Pete. "Here's robbery an' 'sensation. Arter them—arter them like mad! Stop the kidnappers!"

Before the last words were out of his mouth, the active boy was speeding along the sidewalk. The Jung case suddenly assumed new importance. Enemies had seized the little girl, and this, in Pete's opinion, showed no common state of affairs.

By the time the boy reached Jung, the cab was fast disappearing, and the former decided not to stop by the fallen man. The most important thing of all was to have the kidnappers arrested.

The best of plans often miscarry.

As Pete was passing the Hollander, the latter suddenly arose partially, and seized the boy in a tenacious grasp.

"Help!" cried Jung loudly. "Thieves! Robbers! Help! Police!"

"Lemme go!" retorted the boy. "D'ye want them varmints ter get away?"

It was a timely question, but Jung was in no condition to reason coherently. The blow he had received had temporarily destroyed what little common sense he naturally possessed, and he only held the tighter and yelled the louder.

He did not call in vain.

Out of a side street rushed a policeman as fast as his legs could carry him, and with drawn club he made for Pavement Pete.

There was a possibility of trouble ahead for the boy.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. JINGLE UTTERS AN ALARM.

PETE cared nothing for the policeman, for he knew he would have no trouble in establishing his innocence, but he was angry that the Hollander should work against his own interests by checking the pursuit of the abductors; so Pete

did not cease struggling until the patrolman's hand was laid heavily upon him.

The guardian of the peace was nearly out of breath, and Jung's excitement had been communicated to him. A case of highway robbery seemed nipped in the bud.

"What's all this?" the officer demanded, menacing Pavement Pete with his club. "I guess I've made a big haul!"

"You've hauled nothin'!" retorted Pete in disgust. "You've got the wrong pig by the ear entirely, an' you've put your foot in it the wus't way. Let that thick-headed Dutchman put ye on the wrong track, will yer?"

He cast an indignant glance at Jung, as the latter scrambled to his feet, but the look was thrown away.

"My child! my child!" wailed Jung, looking around wildly. "Oh! where is my Beatrix?"

"What's that?" demanded the policeman. "Was there a girl?"

"There was—there was. Oh! my poor child! She has been stole, and there the villain is who did it!"

He pointed to Pavement Pete, much to the boy's disgust.

"Oh! come off!" he exclaimed. "Nobody but you is ter blame fur her bein' lost. I was heelin' it arter the cab like mad when you froze onter me; an' I'd run it down, too, or broke my shoe-strings inter bits; but you've kicked over the hull dough-dish. She's several blocks away now, an' chasin' won't do no good."

"Your story is too thin, youngster!" declared the blue-coat, flourishing his club.

"Ask Jakey."

"Hang Jakey!"

It was plain that the patrolman did not intend to accept such evidence, but another witness was at hand. A second policeman came hurrying up, and his testimony soon put a different face on the matter. He had been on Houston street, and had seen the whole affair from a distance. He promptly declared that Pete was wholly innocent, and that the girl had been taken away in a cab by a man.

This left the men all at sea. The cab had disappeared, and nobody there could identify it. Pete was sure that the horse was brown in color, but as brown horses were very common, this was no clew at all.

Jung was in despair, and, when questioned, could give no reason why little Beatrix should be kidnapped. He certainly knew of no one who could have a motive of revenge, or gain, who should lie in wait for her; yet Pete confidently declared that the abduction had been premeditated and planned with more or less care.

The appearance of a detective on the scene suggested a way of acting at once on the case, and that gentleman took Jung and hurried away down the street. He did not expect to overtake the kidnappers, but he could at least visit Police Headquarters and have an alarm sent out.

Pete and Jakey were left free to go where they saw fit, and they saw fit to go home. Both lived on Prince street, but not in the same house. They separated, and Pete went on alone.

"I'm goin' ter look inter Jung's case some more," he thought, as he went along. "I'm the patent, double-action Sifter o' Secrets, an' I allow thar is one here ter be looked inter. I don't b'lieve that small girl was stole fur nothin'. But why was she stole? Jung seems ter be a very common sort o' a chap, an' I dunno why it should profit anybody ter steal Beatrix, but it's b'en done. Pavement Pete, you must sift this case."

Deciding thus, the boy entered the house.

It was a lodging-house kept by one Mrs. Jingle. The building was large, but there were no millionaires under its roof—indeed, the lodgers thought themselves lucky when they could raise money enough to pay their rent—and Mrs. Jingle thought herself lucky to get it.

She had one lodger who made himself at home all over the house. He lived in every room, and went in and out when he saw fit, whether the doors were locked or unlocked. Omnipresent as he was, he never paid rent, nor was he ever seen in the flesh by other eyes. His name was Poverty.

"Poor, but honest," was the character which Mrs. Jingle had been accustomed to give her lodgers.

Pete lived on the third floor with his grandfather. The old gentleman was his only known relative. Nathan Deane was a veteran of the Mexican war, and the pension he received furnished a part of the means of his support. He was also a cobbler, and in his little room upstairs he drove pegs and drew needles when he

could find anything to work upon. A shop of his own he did not possess, but a neighboring shoemaker passed over all the work he could not attend to himself.

Pete had been instructed in the business by his grandfather, and had become quite skillful, but it was a very rare thing for them to have enough work to keep both busy through any one day. Pete, however, was ambitious, and he now and then secured damaged shoes direct from the wearer, instead of through the cobbler in the basement.

When the Secret-Sifter entered the Deane rooms he found his grandfather hammering away at a shoe.

"Hullo, my boy!" cried the old man, genially.

"Hullo, grandfather! You're at it, I see."

"I am, Peter. Mr. Gripple got four pairs of shoes at once, an' as trade was good, anyhow, he sent two right up to me."

"Where's t'other pair?"

"Over on your bench."

"I'll tackle them at once."

"Supper is not started. Let's have somethin' to eat, first, and then we'll get at the shoes. A dollar an' a half comin' in, Peter! Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" echoed Peter. "We'll git rich yet, grandfather—if only the dollars keep on comin'."

"That's the rub, my boy; that's the rub. Money and girls are some alike, Peter; they're both coy, onartain an' fickle, an' the more you spark 'em, an' make up to 'em, the more they wiggle off an' tanterize ye. They beat the Dutch—money an' girls do!"

Before Mr. Deane had finished this bit of philosophy Pete was at work preparing supper. They always did their own cooking, not having any one else to do it, and being too poor to hire it done. Pete had acquired considerable skill, and he moved around nimbly while his grandfather cheerily drove pegs into the shoe.

In due time they were seated at the table and engaged in doing justice to the food. They were thus occupied when a knock sounded at the door.

"Come in!" called Deane, bluffly.

The door swung back and revealed Mrs. Jingle, the landlady.

Mrs. Jingle had seen fifty years of life, and had never ceased "growing." True, the limit of her stature was reached thirty years before, but day by day she expanded like a balloon in process of inflation. Her exact weight is not of consequence, but it may be said that she made the scales complain whenever her ponderous form was balanced upon them.

Accepting Mr. Deane's invitation, the worthy lady sat down.

"You look flurried, ma'am," observed the shoemaker.

"I be flurried, sir," was the solemn reply.

"Something wrong, eh?"

"Somethin' has gone *very* wrong."

"I'm sorry to hear that. What's the trouble, ma'am, if I may ask?"

Mrs. Jingle had grown very pale, and here she shook her head until her fat cheeks seemed dancing.

"It's all along of my fourth floor, back."

"Mr. Hoopendale?"

"It is Hoopendale," severely agreed the landlady.

"Don't he pay up?"

"He pays up, wal, sir; but money is not all there is in the world."

"Decidedly not."

"I'm worried along o' this Hoopendale, sir."

"He's quiet."

"He's too quiet. I don't like quiet men. Ten ter one, Mr. Deane, they're plottin' mischief."

"I don't know much about Hoopendale—"

"Nor I, an' that is jest whar the trouble comes in. Who is Hoopendale? What is Hoopendale? Is he a mystery? He is. Is he a pirate, a highwayman, or a garroter, or a thief, or a murderer? He may be all o' them. I don't know, sir; but I *do* know that he is a mystery. an' I tell you he ain't no good. As my good pastor would observe, 'The wicked is abroad to devour whom he may ketch.'"

"What's Hoopendale been doin', ma'am?" gently inquired Mr. Deane, for Mrs. Jingle's severity gave promise of a storm.

"He may have been committin' murder, sir. I don't know, an' I don't know anything about him. The man is a mystery, an' has b'en ever sence he come inter this house. Do you remember how I met him in the hall the first time?"

"From the day he took his room I did not see him for two weeks, but his money was regularly pushed under my door in an envelope. He was, an' is, good pay. But when I met him in the

hall I didn't know him; I thought he's a stranger."

"Who be you?" says I.

"Hoopendale," says he.

"You be?" says I.

"I be," says he.

"Likely story," says I; 'you look as much like him as I do like Benjamin Washington or George Franklin.' You see I was confused, an' got the names mixed, though I am usually very accurate."

"Wal, Mr. Deane, I do declare I had hard work ter b'lieve he was himself. He looked shorter and bigger than he did when he hired the room, but he finally convinced me. But that wa'n't the last on't. That man changes his shape frequent. One day he's tall; the next day he's short. One day he's fat; the next day he's lean. He undergoes a metamorphine frequent, an' I really b'lieve it is the case o' Doctor Jackal an' Mr. Hyde over ag'in, sech as I've heard Rosie Abigail Short tell on she seen at the theater. I do, sir, upon my word!"

With this assertion the landlady clasped her chubby hands and looked dismally at Mr. Deane.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASE OF HOOPENDALE.

NATHAN DEANE was too practical to subscribe to the startling views Mrs. Jingle had announced.

"Our eyes are very deceptive, Mrs. Jingle," the old gentleman replied. "A man can't very well change his size, an' you don't see Hoopendale very often."

"You're mighty right there! He shuts himself up in his room like a Bluebeard, an' what does he do all the time? He says he's a toy-maker. Bah! He couldn't make a toy a deaf-mute would play with!"

"He is very reserved—"

"Just like Doctor Jackal and Mr. Hyde."

"But as ter changin' his size—"

"He does it, an' I'll swear to it!" declared Mrs. Jingle, with emphasis.

"Suppose he does," cheerily returned the old soldier. "What then? Ain't he a good lodger? He's quiet."

"Still waters run deep, an' I know Hoopendale is a rascal."

Deane had heard all this before, so he tried to get Mrs. Jingle away from the subject.

"Is there anything new, ma'am?"

"There is somethin' new," Mrs. Jingle ponderously declared. "This Mr. Jackal—I mean Hoopendale—is still alive, an' he's active. He keeps clost' ter his room, but don't you think fur one minute that he's dead. I tell you, Mr. Deane, there is a brain in that man's head that is perfectly awful!"

"What has he done?"

"It's what he's goin' ter do that worries me, an' it harrasses me sore."

"What is he goin' to do?"

"That is jest what I don't know, but things are gettin' wuss. That there Jackal has been havin' men to his room, off an' on, ever sence he's been here, an' mysterious parcels have been in an' out. Men would bring things here an' not take them away, an' they would take things away that they didn't bring. Nat'rally I've hated ter speak o' this, for the credit o' my house is at stake, but I've had an awful feelin' that my fourth floor, back, was the headquarters of a gang o' desperadoes."

Again Mrs. Jingle clasped her hands, and she rolled her eyes upward pitifully.

"Cheer up, ma'am," returned Mr. Deane, briskly. "I don't think you need ter worry an' artom. Mr. Hoopendale is an image-maker, an' the things you've seen carried out an' in are prob'ly his images, finished an' unfinished. He once asked me in, an' I see a dozen queer little figgers on his table—imitation sojers, firemen, sailors, an' so on, done in wood."

"He took you into his room ter bamboozle you. Don't tell me that wretch gets his livin' carvin' out them things. This country has enough machinery ter supply all its babies, an' Africa, with toys, an' have no whittlin' out by hand—I think."

A momentary doubt of the correctness of her assertion crossed Mrs. Jingle's mind, but she quickly rallied.

"I ain't told you what happened to-day. A few hours ago I seen Hoopendale go out, an' it struck me I'd go up ter his room an' see how things was lookin'. You know he keeps his own room, same as you do, an' I ain't been in for some time. Up I goes, key in hand, but when I go to the door, I declare! ef I didn't hear somebody inside."

"That made me cautious, an' I peeps through

the keyhole—somethin' I never did afore—an' what do you s'pose I see? Why, Hoopendale, himself, big an' life; an' yet I'll take my affidavit I seen him leave the house not five minutes before, as I know he hadn't come back. Ef that ain't proof that he's a Doctor Jackal—a man in league with the Evil One, an' capable o' doin' fiendish things—what is it?"

"It is clear, Mrs. Jingle, that you have been deceived by a resemblance," explained Mr. Deane. "There is two men who looks alike, an' prob'ly they're brothers. T'other one visits your lodger, so he ain't so mysterious after all."

"Ain't he? You shall hear. When I seen this I went straight down-stairs an' waited for the double ter come back. He came in half an hour, an' it was Hoopendale, sure's you live. Up to his room he goes, an' up I goes jest one minute later. I knocked, an' one of him comes to the door. The excuse I had in my mind was that I wanted ter see about the water pipes in his room, but when I got in I was that weak in the knees I could skeercely stand."

"Mr. Deane, sir, there was only one man in that there room! Brothers, be they? Can brothers j'ine themselves inter one person? No, sir; Hoopendale is in league with the Evil One, an' he can take any shape, or as many at once, as he chooses!"

Mrs. Jingle spoke with emphasis, and Deane's cheerful face grew grave.

He did not believe in her theory, but it occurred to him that there was something peculiar about the fourth floor, back.

"Is there a closet in the room?" he asked.

"There is, sir."

"The second man was in there."

"How do you know?"

"Reason tells me so."

"Does reason tell you *why* he went in there?" asked Mrs. Jingle, with some sarcasm.

"Yes; he went in so you needn't see him. I admit it don't look jest right, ma'am; I don't see why Hoopendale should have company he's ashamed of, or aferd ter have seen."

"Humph! men don't like ter have their double seen."

Deane shook his head slowly; he saw the folly of arguing the point.

"I say there is mischief afoot in my fourth floor, back," pursued the landlady. "My other lodgers are frank an' plain, an' there ain't one on 'em but he's told me all about his past an' his family, when I've asked him; but Hoopendale is sly and secret. Not a word do I get out of him. Is he social with me, or you, or anybody else here? No, sir, he is not; but he's as close-mouthed as a cat. An' the visitors who come ter see him are the same. Mystery, mystery everywhere! Who's that grum old Jackal up in the back room? What mischief is he plottin'? I declare, I've a good mind ter band him over to the perleece—yes, an' I would, too, only he's prompt pay. I'll say that for Hoopendale. Bah! I don't b'lieve that's his name, anyhow. When I was up there I seen an envelope on his table directed to Daniel Markin."

"To who?"

Pavement Pete suddenly broke his silence with the question.

"I said Daniel Markin."

Pete remained looking at Mrs. Jingle blankly.

"Do you know him?" she added.

"Yes—no. Seems ter me I've heard the name."

The Secret-Sifter *had* heard it. He remembered Jan Jung and the story he had told. According to that, the man who had been at the head of the bogus land-agency, and had taken Jung's money and sent him off to Florida on a wild-goose chase, had been named Daniel Markin.

Pete was not inclined to let Mrs. Jingle into the secret, and he turned to his grandfather.

"Ain't there an alderman named that?" he asked.

"I think not, Peter."

"Be you sure, Mrs. Jingle, that it was 'Daniel Markin,' that was on the letter?" Pete added.

"Why, certain I be."

"Mebbe the name I's thinkin' on was Har-kins," observed the boy, with a thoughtful air.

He had put Mrs. Jingle off the track, but he was freshly interested. The mysterious lodger assumed new importance, and he was no longer indifferent.

Mrs. Jingle aired her views for some time longer, and then arose to go.

"You may say what you will," she observed, in conclusion, "but I will stick to it that Hoopendale is no better than he ought to be, an' I do b'lieve he's a Doctor Jackal!"

With this farewell shot she left the room.

Supper was over, and both Mr. Deane and Pete sat down and began to drive pegs briskly.

"It wouldn't s'prise me," said the old man, "if Hoopendale is cheatin' Mrs. Jingle. She let the room to one man, an' I'll bet there is two brothers occupying it. Ef that is so, she's bein' cheated out o' a dollar a week."

"Yes."

Pavement Pete answered mechanically, for his mind was busy. How had a letter addressed to Daniel Markin got into Hoopendale's room? The man who swindled Jan Jung had been comparatively young, while Hoopendale looked to be sixty-five—double Markin's years.

Pete, however, remembered that Mrs. Jingle had spoken, in the past, of Hoopendale's visitors and their queer ways. They had been a "queer lot," to use her expression, and had been about as sly as Hoopendale. It was possible that the fourth floor, back, was a rendezvous for law-breakers.

Up to this time he had taken no interest in Hoopendale. He had regarded him as a queer old fellow, who preferred a semi-hermit life to being sociable like other folks, but there was a possibility that the man was not so much a hermit as he seemed.

"I've got to look inter this," thought Pete, as he drove in the pegs with emphasis. "I'm a Secret-Sifter, an' here is a secret worth siftin'. Ef Hoopendale knows Daniel Markin, it will pay me wal ter put the perlece on the track."

His mind wandered to little Beatrix Jung, and he wondered greatly what had become of her. The abduction had been both bold and reckless, and its success had been purely the result of chance, for it is not easy to abduct a person in broad daylight in New York; but, nevertheless, it had been a success.

"But I can't see why she was stole. Can Jung be o' more importance than he let on? Shouldn't wonder ef thar was a screw loose som'ers."

Thinking thus, Pete pegged away until his grandfather announced that it was time to stop for the night.

Pete was willing, but he did not think of retiring at once. His mind was on the fourth floor, back, and its mysterious occupant; and he went to the hall, and then quietly ascended the stairs.

He had considerable curiosity to learn if anything of interest was then occurring on the top floor.

CHAPTER V.

SEEKING TO SIFT A SECRET.

THE upper hall was perfectly dark. Mrs. Jingle did not believe in wasting oil, and her only two tenants on that floor—Hoopendale and Mrs. Plum, a seamstress—were too poor to pay for luxuries. Pete could see a faint line of light under both doors, but it did not serve to break the darkness at all.

Before he could investigate at all he heard footsteps in the hall below, and, looking down, saw Hoopendale himself. The man was coming up, so Pete retreated to the extremity of the hall and stood as still as possible. He knew the darkness would save him from discovery, unless events took some unexpected turn.

The old man came up slowly, using his cane and breathing hard. He was active for one of his years, but climbing the stairs seemed to take away his breath.

He reached the landing, and Pete expected to see him produce a key and open his door, but, instead, he knocked in what the boy watcher thought a peculiar way. Almost at once a click sounded and the door was opened; some one had unlocked it on the inner side.

Pete saw this person plainly for a moment, and then the old man entered nimbly, the door closed, and the key clicked in the lock again.

It was not done soon enough to defeat Pete's alert vision. If Mrs. Jingle had been there, she might well have said that Hoopendale had been admitted by himself—certainly, the man who had gone in, and he who had admitted him, were, to the casual view, as much alike as two persons could be.

Pete chuckled. He had none of Mrs. Jingle's superstition, and did not look to the supernatural for an explanation. It seemed that there were two men, one of whom was Hoopendale, who looked remarkably alike, and Nathan Deane's theory that they might be brothers did not look improbable.

The boy would have been satisfied with this theory had it not been for Mrs. Jingle's assertion that she had seen an envelope addressed to "Daniel Markin" in her mysterious lodger's room.

In view of this fact it was impossible for Pete

to look at the matter in other than a suspicious light.

"That air envelope didn't git in thar by chance," he thought, "an' as Daniel Markin is plainly bad medicine, I allow I shall be justified in lookin' inter this biz. Bein' a Sifter o' Secrets, it's my duty ter track down the missin' land-swindler ef I kin. It's ord'narily a mean trick ter listen at doors, but I'm goin' ter do it now."

Satisfied that the men had withdrawn from the door, he moved forward and applied his ear to the key-hole.

He could hear them talking in subdued voices.

"It's a risky piece of work," said one.

"That's nothing new for us."

"Of course not."

"I'm sure the job will pay well."

"You are sure about the money, are you?"

"Dead sure."

"And the young fellow will pay well?"

"He must. He ain't in a position to quibble much. He's been a fast blade, and is head over ears in debt. Not having any conscience, he'll get out the best way he can, and there is only one way. We place that way—of which he knows nothing—thus far—before him. What will he do? Why, he'll jump at it like a fish."

"Probably."

"But if he refuses we'll play the goody-goody dodge, and hand over the lost treasure. In any case we shall get well paid."

"Have you left no clew?"

"Absolutely none."

"And you can deliver said treasure on the sly?"

"Quiet as a mouse."

"I don't want any cops down on me."

"There won't be any."

"My landlady is showing up as a prying fool, and she may get dangerous. I think you had better be introduced to her as my brother."

"Just as you see fit."

"How much money is at stake?"

"A hundred thousand, sure."

"No flaw in the claim?"

"No. I've looked it up, myself, and I know. The mayor says it is one of the best lay-outs we've had for months. Every one of the aldermen voted for it."

Pavement Pete opened his eyes widely. Just when he thought he had got track of the mystery fully, here were noted names brought in. "The mayor" and "the aldermen" sounded very ponderous just then, and Pete grew doubtful.

"It's a great municipal reform," added the last speaker, after a pause, and a laugh accompanied the remark.

"No doubt the people will think so when they hear of it."

"Just so."

"What is the mayor doing now?"

"Collecting money for the heathen of Africa."

"What luck?"

"Good!"

"The mayor is very useful in philanthropic work."

"The best mayor we ever had."

"Well, as to the treasure, I'll let it go as Meg says. If she is willing, I sha'n't kick."

"I'll wager something that Meg consents."

There was a sound of footsteps in the room, and Pete heard a chair moved back. He thought that the men were coming out, and he retreated to the extremity of the hall, but as no one appeared, finally ventured back to the door. Not a sound could he hear in the room. Everything was quiet in the house and outside, and Pete's hearing was acute, but there was nothing to reward his labor.

He could not help feeling perplexed.

"Dunno but Mrs. Jingle is right, an' that Hoopendale is a spook," the boy thought, with a grimace. "Now, I could almost take my affidavit thar ain't nobody in thar. Can they have sprouted wings an' flew out o' the winder like birds? I'll bet Mrs. Jingle would think so ef she was here, but I reckon there is a reasonable way ter explain it—but it's mighty queer!"

Indeed, the sudden silence was puzzling, and Pete could not account for it. Had there been any way out of the room he would have thought they had gone away, but not even a fire-escape broke the long descent from the window.

Many minutes had passed when the voices began again as suddenly as they had ceased.

"Well, that settles it," observed one of the two.

"Yes; I ain't got any more to say."

"You must take good care of the treasure."

"I will."

"The mayor will see that you get duly paid."

"If he don't, I'll apply to the governor."

Evidently there was a joke somewhere, for both men laughed audibly.

"Well, I'm off," announced the visitor.

Pete waited for no more. The speaker was approaching the door, and it was no longer a safe place. The boy retreated once more to the end of the hall.

The door opened, and one of the two Hoopendales came out. He started down the stairs, and then his double closed and locked the door.

Pavement Pete nodded emphatically.

"Pete, you'll postpone yer hour fur goin' ter bed ter-night," he muttered. "As a Secret-Sifter you hev a sacred duty ter perform. Them two mysteries needs lookin' arter the wu'st way, an' you want ter foller the lost one ter his den. Get up an' at it, Peter!"

By this time he was gliding quietly down the stairs. He was shrewd enough to know that the man might take precautions against being followed, and guarded against discovery. Instead of going out of the front door, as the second Hoopendale did, he ran down one more flight of stairs and emerged from the basement-door.

Hoopendale was then going down the street, but Pete was wary. He lingered in the shadow until he saw the man look around, then he ran lightly across the street.

He had timed himself well, for Hoopendale Number Two soon turned his head again.

He saw only a boy walking demurely along on the opposite sidewalk.

Apparently convinced that he was not followed, he then struck out briskly. Pavement Pete smiled coolly.

"Mister, you're sailin' under a false flag," he observed, to himself. "You look ter be over sixty, an' you walk like you wa'n't over half that. I'm afeard you ain't no brother o' the innercent Hoopendale on the fourth floor. Innocent! So be sharks innercent!"

The pursuit was fairly begun, and as the man looked around no more, Pete had no great trouble in following him.

Hoopendale—we will continue to call him so—passed along with the easy confidence of one who knows his way well. His course was east to the Bowery, south to Grand street, and then again east toward the river. He did not turn again until he reached one of the many streets that have their beginning at Grand street and run north.

By this time New York had grown about as quiet as it ever is. There were people astir on the streets, but all save the "night-owls" were homeward bound.

Peter Deane was not troubled by the lateness of the hour—a "Secret-Sifter" has to be out at all times.

Finally Hoopendale's manner became more careful. He looked around twice, as though to make sure that he was not followed, and Pete was not backward to suspect that he was nearing his destination.

This idea was correct. He finally paused for a moment at the door of what looked to be an innocent building, used, perhaps, for manufacturing purposes. He rapped on the door, and it was opened after a brief delay. The man on guard, for there was such a person, allowed him to pass in unquestioned.

Then the door was closed and Pete was left alone in the street.

"The jig seems ter be up fur now," he muttered, as he looked sharply at the building. "That giraffe on guard won't let me in, an' I don't jest see how I kin get in on my own hook."

CHAPTER VI.

PETE IS ANXIOUS TO GET IN.

PETE surveyed the building carefully. It was of brick, and four stories high. It still had the look of a manufacturing place, and not a light was visible. Some sort of a sign was visible at the entrance, and Pete made a detour and approached the door to read it. Arriving there, he found that it bore the simple inscription of "The Icarus Manufacturing Co."

This might be a genuine thing, but Pete had his doubts.

He was considering what to do next, when he saw a messenger-boy approach and begin to look at the building critically.

"Want ter find somebody, partner?" Pete asked.

"Yes. Are you acquainted 'round here?"

"A good bit, yes."

"I've a latter addressed to C. C. Pike. This is the number, but it ain't a house, and it seems to be closed."

Pete had a sudden idea.

"Did the letter come from the telegraph office?" he inquired.

"No."
 "Where, then?"
 "A blood gave it to me on the street."
 "Wal, look-a-hyar, my frien', I'll d'liver that 'ere letter fur you," generously announced Pete. The other boy looked suspicious.
 "Deliver it to whom?"
 "Cadwallader Carter Pike."
 "You know him, then?"
 "Rather! His brother's cousin is courtin' my sister. I'll take it ter Cad an' welcome."
 The messenger hesitated a moment longer. It was not that his conscience was troubling him, for he had none, but he was considering the chances of discovery. Having been paid, he was not very particular what became of the letter as long as his want of care did not make trouble for himself in the future.
 He decided suddenly.
 "Here you go!" he said, passing the letter over to Pete.
 "All right, pard; I'll see that C. C. Pike gets it."

The messenger walked rapidly away, while Pete closed one eye and looked after him sagely. "My frien', you've helped me out," he soliloquized. "I's wonderin' how I'd get inter that Bluebird's castle, an' now I know how I'll try. Whether it's a go, I'll see later. Jest as like as not I'll get inter some measly fix, but none but the brave deserve the fair. All thar is about it, ef thar is a lot o' p'ison snakes in thar, an' they flax me, somebody else will have ter finish that pair o' shoes I'm solin'!"

With this philosophical thought he advanced to the door and knocked. The same man he had seen before opened the door, but, on discovering who it was, that person immediately assumed a suspicious scowl.

"Get out o' hyar!" he growled.
 "I ain't in, mister," Pete coolly replied.
 "What do you want?"
 "Got a letter fur a party here."

"Who?"
 "C. C. Pike, an' I'd like ter see-see him. Hope you don't object ter puns?"

"Let me see the letter."
 Pete promptly produced it, and the man read the superscription. He then looked critically at the bearer.

"Where did you get it?"
 "A man give it to me on the street, an' give me half a dollar. Dunno who he was."

"I'll take the letter."
 "Be you Pike?"
 "No."
 "I hev strick orders ter give it only ter Pike, hisself."

"Go up stairs, then, you obstinate young donkey! You'll find a door open off the first-floor corridor. Go in there—you'll see the light—and ask for Pike."

"All right, colonel."
 The boy concealed his exultation under an air of carelessness, and passed the guard. Beyond was a staircase, with a light showing above. He mounted the steps composedly. He was in for the adventure, whatever it might be, and was eager to see the result. There was no doubt in his mind that lawless men were in the building, but no fear troubled him as he went on to meet the next stage of his exploit.

Reaching the floor above he at once distinguished the room to which the guard referred. The door was open, and a light shone beyond. He heard the sound of voices, and would have given considerable for a chance to listen a while before showing himself, but it was too risky to think of.

He walked into the room.
 A conversation was going on there, and as he entered he caught one significant sentence.

"Should we find it necessary, we'll give the Dutchman a bed at the bottom of the East River!"

And then in marched Pete. Even then he could not help wondering if the "Dutchman" thus referred to was Jan Jung, but it was no time to meditate. The Secret-Sifter saw that he was where his wits were needed, and he gave all his attention to business.

Three men were in the room; gaudily-dressed men who looked as though they were "sports" and drunkards in convention. They had stopped talking very suddenly, and all were looking sharply and suspiciously at Pete.

"Hullo! who's this?" asked one, abruptly.
 "I'm P. Deane," answered the boy, and then he wished he had kept his name to himself.

"How did you come here?"
 "The chap at the door let me in."
 "What for?"

"I've got a letter for C. C. Pike, Esquire."
 "Oh! that alters it. Boys, where is Pike?"

"He went to City Hall, but I guess he'll soon be back."

"Boy, you can leave the letter and go."
 This was just what Pete did not want to do. He would be poorly rewarded for his risk if he at once left the building.

"I was ter see ef there wuz an answer," he explained.
 "Oh! well; sit down, then, and wait for Pike."

The speaker motioned to a chair, and Pete promptly accepted it. The men were over their uneasiness, and they began to talk in a low voice. They intended to make what they said entirely private, and they succeeded to such a degree that Pete could catch no entire sentence. An occasional fragment he did hear, and this was enough to increase his interest.

"The girl," "a good round sum," "the Dutchman," "a big boodle for us," "hold fast to the girl, whatever the risk"—these, and less important scraps, Pete managed to overhear.

The matter was growing exciting. He was positive that these men were talking about Jan Jung and little Beatrix, though where the "big boodle" came in he could not see. Jan Jung had announced himself nearly penniless when he accused Halpin of being the Florida land-agent.

"Thar's more in this than shows on the top layer," thought Pete. "Beatrix wa'n't stole fur nothin', an' this gang sartainly looks sharp enough to know butter from lard."

Perhaps ten minutes passed, and then another man entered the room.

"Here's somebody to see you, Pike."
 The speaker pointed to Pete.

"What is it, boy?" the new-comer asked.
 "Be you C. C. Pike?"
 "Yes."

"Then hyar's a letter. Gents like me doin' biz hev' ter be sorter keerful, an' it never'd do ter d'liver the letter to the wrong chap."

"I'm glad you're so careful. You look like a wide-awake boy, and, I dare say, you'll make your mark, yet."

"Not much, fur I kin write my name."
 "Hullo! our bantam is nimble of tongue, ain't he?"

Pete was gaining ground. Nobody likes quick retorts more than sharpers—as long as the retorts are not against themselves.

Pike opened the letter and read it, but it did not seem to please him. He perused it a second time, and then devoted a little time to thought. He ended by throwing it on the table beside his companions.

"Read that!" he directed.
 They obeyed.

"The old cove don't give up easy, does he?" was then asked, carelessly.

"Give up! should say not; but that ain't the worst of it. The lads who were out in the cab—you know where—say that they saw the old blade on the corner. He gave them a sharp glance, and they were a bit afraid he was piping them off."

"You don't think he's on, do you?"
 "I felt a bit uneasy before, and now I've read the letter, I'm more that way."

"Suppose he took another cab and followed?"
 "That's the rub."

The men looked at each other inquiringly, but one suddenly added:

"Remember we are not alone."
 "The boy can't hear at this distance," answered Pike, "and, in any case, we've said nothing compromising. We will be careful, though. As to the boy, he looks like a shrewd knave."

"New York boys are always shrewd."
 "And this one looks like a knave."

"What if he is?"
 "I was thinking," replied Pike, "that we might make him useful, if only he's a bird of the right feather. We have had no boys since Light-heels Teddy was sent up the river, and I'm tired of running my own errands. I like the cut of this young scamp's jib; I have a good mind to look into his case and see if he's the right sort."

"You want to look mighty sharp, then. We don't want to trust a boy unless he's true blue."

"Nor will we; and I'll use due care. As to this particular boy, it won't do any harm to send him for a cab, will it?"

"Not if you keep him in the dark."

"I will, certainly. I think it prudent to get the treasure away at once, for this letter confirms the idea I had before—that this is not a safe place to keep said treasure. Should the police make a descent, the whole job would go up in smoke, and we should be likely to 'go up,' too."

CHAPTER VII.

PETE IS ANXIOUS TO GET OUT.

AT this point Pike was cautioned by one of his companions not to talk so loud, and all lowered their voices so that Pavement Pete heard no more. He found it hard to maintain an indifferent manner, and pretend that he had overheard nothing, but he did this successfully.

While listening he had also used his eyes secretly, and he believed he had made another discovery. Unless he was greatly mistaken, Pike and the bogus Hoopendale were one and the same person. Their motions were alike, and it was not surprising to find Hoopendale transformed into a young man.

His quick movements on the street had prepared Pete for this discovery.

After a few moments' conversation Pike again turned to Pete.

"My lad, do you want to go on an errand?" he asked.

"Is there boodle in it?" asked the Secret-Sifter, with well-assumed cupidity.

"Twenty-five cents for ten minutes' work."

"I'll go."

"Good! It is simple enough; I only want you to go to a stable and order a cab. You can return here when you have done it."

"I'm yer man, colonel!" declared Pete, promptly.

Pike gave more particular directions, and then went into the hall with his messenger, and told the man on guard that the boy was to go out, and be allowed to return, without hindrance.

Pete was soon on the street and hastening toward the place where he was to order the cab.

"That air is a p'ison bad gang up thar," he thought, as he walked along. "One o' the malarious cabals that infest New York an' make life dang'rous ter honest folks like Jan Jung an' Mrs. Jingle. Jan Jung! Say, I'm bettin' a bran'-new, bright, shiny dollar, o' the series o' 1949, that this crowd is the one that is worritin' Jung. I ain't no doubt on't, though how they kin pluck a pigeon that ain't got no feathers, I don't perzackly see. But thar is some myst'ry about Jung—thar is, sure's you're alive, Peter D."

When he reached the stable he found that only one cab was in. This had lately arrived, but the driver was directed to go out again. Pete lingered for a moment, and not only impressed the driver's face upon his mind, but secured the number of the cab.

This done, he went back to see Pike.

Passing the surly guard he went up-stairs. Only one man was in the room, but loud voices off at one side showed that others were astir. These voices seemed to be excited and angry, but Pete outwardly ignored these signs, and sat down, when invited by his sole companion.

This man, too, seemed 'ill at ease. He frequently glanced toward the door behind which the loud talk was taking place, but he seemed to think that some one was needed to watch Pete, and he kept his place.

Suddenly the door opened and Pike reappeared. His face bore an angry expression, and he spoke at once in an explosive way:

"I'll be shot if the little minx hasn't fastened that door so we can't get it open."

The second man glanced at Pete.

"Hush!" he cautioned.

"Ah, the boy. Egad, Zach, why can't we put him to use? He's small and nimble—why can't he crawl in through the transom and open the door?"

"I think we had better manage our own affairs."

"Perhaps you can tell how to do it?"

"Smash in the door!"

"What! let that little imp of sin lead us to such a step? Not much! We'll have her out without knocking down the whole house."

Pike again turned his gaze upon Pete.

"Boy, you look fly," he observed.

"New York boys generally be fly," proudly returned the Secret-Sifter.

"How is your conscience?"

"Haven't seen it lately," asserted Pete, assuming a hardened manner.

"Suppose I give you a chance to earn half a dollar, will you keep mum, or will you tell it on every street-corner?"

"Nary tell. Put a half-dollar 'tween my teeth, an' my jaws 'll close so tight nary word kin git out."

Pike looked relieved.

"Well, I've got a bit of work for you. My young niece has turned rebel and won't listen to reason. She has refused to attend school, so I am going to take her to my sister's; but now she

has locked herself into a room, and won't open the door."

"This is ser'us," observed Pete.

"How?"

"Education is good fur man, woman an' beast, an' them as grow up an' don't know a Greek bivalve from a Yankee bicycle will regret in after life their neglect ter git educated when they could."

"Just so, my by; I see you have the correct idea."

"Got it at Columby College," quoth Pete, seriously.

"Well, will you crawl in through the transom?"

"Ef I can, I will."

"Come on, then."

Pete followed promptly.

"What I want," Pike added, "is to have you unlock the door when you get into the room. Of course Sallie—that is my niece's name—will object, but that is natural. The girl is a terrible liar, and there is no knowing what yarn she may tell you."

"I ain't goin' in ter hear a story, but ter work," coolly replied Pete.

"Exactly. I see you are sensible clear through."

Perhaps Pike would yet find Pete too sensible to suit him. The Secret-Sifter had made up his mind that the girl in the case was Beatrix Jung, and was anxious to see her. Just what he would do if it proved to be Beatrix he did not know.

Following Pike, he was led to a door where two men stood in sulky silence.

"I'll give her a last chance," observed Pike, as he mounted a chair and brought his face up to the transom. Then looking inside, he added: "Come, Sallie, we've had enough of your rebellion. Will you open the door?"

"No, I won't!" replied a spirited but childish voice.

"Sallie, you mustn't be wicked."

"It's you that's wicked."

Pike added several more fatherly speeches, all of which Pete thought were uttered to influence him, but the young "rebel" in the next room was not to be wheedled.

"See here," added Pike, becoming angry, "if you don't open the door I'll send a boy through the transom, and have him unlock it."

There was no answer.

"Will you open it?"

"No."

"That settles it."

Pike motioned to Pete, who stepped up in the chair. Then the man gave him a boost toward the transom. To reach it was not hard, but Pete's trouble then began. Small as he was, he soon found that the transom was a narrow place to squeeze through. He made the attempt and stuck fast, but his own exertions, added to those of Pike, forced him forward.

There was a light in the room, but the girl had fled to an alcove at one corner and was not visible. Pete had obtained only a brief view of her, and that was as she fled, but he was more than ever of the opinion that it was Beatrix Jung.

He twisted through the narrow space at last, and dropped to the floor.

"Now unlock the door!" directed Pike, in a tone of great satisfaction.

Pete disregarded the direction and made for the alcove at once. There he saw the little girl, turned at bay in mingled defiance and despair, and his theory was confirmed.

It was Beatrix.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed hurriedly, "what's goin' on here?"

"Oh! don't open the door for them!" the girl cried.

"Be you their prisoner?"

"Yes, they stole me."

"What fur?"

"I don't know."

"Did you ever see 'em afore?"

"No."

"I allow you ain't that feller's niece?"

"I never saw him until to-night. My name is not Sallie, but Beatrix; and my father is Jan Jung."

"Ain't you no idee why you was stole?"

"No."

"What be they goin' ter do with ye?"

"I don't know; only they're going to take me away somewhere. Oh! you won't open the door for them, will you?" and she clasped her hands nervously.

"I don't know, yet—"

An imperious knock sounded at the door.

"Say, where does that go?"

Pete pointed to the window that led out of the alcove.

"Into a back-yard."

"Can't we git out?"

"No. It is ever so far down."

Pete threw up the window. No light except their own was burning near at hand, and he could see but little of the yard below, except that it appeared to be of the usual sort. He caught up a newspaper lying near at hand, ignited it at the gas-jet, and held it out of the window.

Hope revived when he saw that there was a shed, or lean-to, directly below, and the distance was such that, had he been alone, he would not have hesitated to leap out. With Beatrix it was a very different matter.

He glanced at the bed. He had heard before then of making ropes of sheets, and there was the means.

Rap! rap! rap!

Again the knock, and this time more imperious than before. Pike and his friends were becoming impatient.

Pete tore off the sheets and began upon the rope. Beatrix watched with clasped hands, but she had become suddenly speechless. The ray of hope had been wholly unexpected, and even then she did not grasp the idea fully.

Her would-be champion was working as though for his life, but a tremendous hammering now began on the door. They could hope for but little more time.

CHAPTER VIII.

PETE GETS INTO CLOSE QUARTERS.

"We've got ter go out o' the winder!" Pete hurriedly explained; "but don't you be skeert. I'll tie this rope ter your waist, an' lower ye down as easy as a feather would fall."

"What'll we do when we get down?"

"Run away."

"There is a big, high fence around the yard."

"I've climbed fences afore now."

The rope was done, and Pavement Pete turned to the girl, but a constant clattering now sounded at the door.

"Boy," came in Pike's voice, "where are you?"

"I'm here!" chuckled Pete, in a low voice.

"Open this door, I say! Open it, or we'll burst it in!"

"Burst away!" muttered the resolute boy, as he tied the rope around Beatrix's waist.

He then lost no time in getting her out of the window. She understood his plan, and agreed to it with quiet bravery few girls would have shown under such circumstances. Pete had tested the strength of the novel rope, and he steadily lowered her outside.

It was a time of keen suspense while she dangled in the air, and just then came Pike's voice again.

"See here, you young scoundrel!" the man cried, angrily, "if you don't unlock this door I'll make you howl when I get hold of you. We're going to break it in!"

Not a word answered Pete. Beatrix's feet touched the shed, and he made prompt efforts to follow her. Swinging himself out of the window, he grasped the rope and went down rapidly. He was soon standing by the girl's side, and it was the work of only a moment to untie the rope.

He then leaped to the ground—a distance of only a few feet—and aided her to follow.

They were in the yard, at last, and though Pete had no clear plan of action he was confident of his ability to get away. Surely, there must be some honest men there, and when they had passed from this yard into some other, Pike and his men would find that they could not run the whole city of New York.

Even then Pete did not forget one idea that was haunting him.

"Say, why did they steal you?" he persisted.

"I don't know."

"Has your father got any money?"

"No; he was cheated out of all he had."

The assertion perplexed Pete more than ever as to the motive for Beatrix's abduction, but he abandoned the investigation for awhile as he ran heavily against the fence, not being able to see it in the dark.

"Now for a climb!" he said, cheerfully.

"The fence is terrible high," Beatrix replied.

"We'll soon go over."

He put up his hand, but failed to reach the top, and then, as his vision became more accustomed to the darkness, he saw a solid wall of boards reaching far above him. Beatrix had not exaggerated when she said that the fence was "terrible high;" it was certainly all of that, and Pete knew that he could not climb it at that point. Holding to the girl's hand he began a hurried circuit of the yard.

It did not take long to go entirely around, and then an alarming fact forced itself upon him.

They were hemmed in by a fence ten feet high.

"Say," he exclaimed, "did you see a ladder anywhere?"

"No."

"Or a board? Or a pole?"

"No; there wasn't anything in the yard."

"By jinks! we've got ter get somethin', right off, quick. Wait! I'll tear a board off of the shed, an' then I reckon we kin get over, but this fence ain't ter be climbed without a step; it's as smooth as glass."

He hastened to the shed, but as he did so there was a crash in the room they had just left.

The door had been burst in!

Pavement Pete began to get excited. Dangers were pursuing them sharply, and the end was near at hand. If they could not get out of the yard without delay, they would not get out at all. The empty room would show where they had gone, and then the whole gang would rush to the yard.

Pete laid hold of a board forming a part of the shed, and just then a man appeared at the window. The darkness did not seem to trouble his eyes, for he at once exclaimed:

"There they are!"

He thrust his hand out of the window, and the light from within glittered on the polished barrel of a revolver. The weapon was pointed directly at Pete, but a shot was prevented by a second man who grasped the would-be marksman's wrist.

"Madman! what would you do?" he exclaimed. "A shot will ruin us. Hustle down to the basement and all will be well; they can't get out of the yard."

And both men disappeared.

Desperately Pete tugged at the board, but it did not give way. The shed was nearly new, and every part of it was nailed in place securely.

The boy was for a few seconds almost demoralized. What was he to do next? What could he do? Escape from the yard was simply out of the question, and the men were hastening down.

The basement! The thought of this place came to him suddenly, though he greeted it only as a forlorn hope. If they could get in there might be a grain of hope, but it would be strange, indeed, if the door was not locked. He tried it. Greatly to his surprise and delight it yielded at once.

He called to Beatrix and hurried her inside. All was superlatively dark there, but he could hear heavy footsteps above. The men were close at hand. Pete locked the door through which they had just entered, and congratulated himself on his forethought. When the men failed to find them in the yard they would naturally wonder what had become of them, and the locked door might prevent a search of the house.

All seemed to depend upon whether any of their party knew that the door had been unlocked.

Feeling his way, Pete worked back through a passage until he brought up against the wall. At that moment the door above was flung open, light flashed down into the hall, and the men began to descend. Pete felt Beatrix's hand tremble in his, but not a word of complaint passed her lips.

The foremost of the men was Pike. He carried the lamp in one hand, and an ugly-looking club in the other.

"I'll make that young traitor repent this to his last moment!" he viciously asserted.

It did not seem to surprise him to find the door locked; he gave the key a wrench, and out they went.

Pete then had a choice before him. Should he go up the stairs and try to run the gantlet of the other men, or remain where he was? Any search in the passage would, of course, reveal them at once, but there was a chance that such a search would not be made. Since the door had been locked, the men might think it impossible for them to have re-entered the house.

This was a frail hope upon which to pin his faith, and Pete decided another way.

"You stay here a second," he said to Beatrix, "an' I'll jest slide up the stairs an' see if the way is clear."

"All right."

The girl spoke rather faintly, but she would not oppose his plan. He left her and ran lightly up the stairs. Beyond was a large, long room with many doors opening out of it, and as utter silence reigned there, the Secret-Sifter quickly made his decision—he would make the

trial in that direction. There was no time to lose, for the men in the yard would soon discover that no one was to be found there, and he hastened back.

He was just in time, for he heard an angry voice as he reached the foot of the stairs.

"They ain't here, and there ain't any use of looking."

Pete ran forward to get Beatrix.

He reached the end of the hall, but did not see her anywhere. He called her name quickly, but softly—there was no answer. He put out his hand to touch her, but he felt only the wall. Just then the lighted lamp was brought near the door, and its light shone dimly to the extremity of the hall.

Beatrix was not there!

Pete satisfied himself of this fact, and then stood dumfounded. What did it mean? He could see no door, and there was no visible way of leaving the place except toward the foot of the stairs; and if the girl had gone that way, she must then have ascended the stairs or gone out into the yard.

She had done neither, evidently, so how was it to be accounted for?

Pike and his men re-entered the hall. Pete was too much dazed to take refuge under the incline of the stairs, and had the men used due watchfulness, discovery must have followed; but this they did not do.

Their leader closed the door viciously.

"I don't understand this," he said, angrily, as he locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"I guess they've taken wings and flown away," suggested one of his companions.

"Don't talk nonsense, Bob."

"Well, why don't you catch them?"

"Are you sure you saw any one when you looked out of the chamber window?"

"I am."

"And that it was the boy and girl?"

"It was the boy; I didn't see the girl."

"Might it not have been some other boy?"

"Well, it's possible, I suppose," Bob hesitatingly agreed; "but even if it was, where did the other boy go? He would find it as hard to get out of the yard as your treacherous aid would."

"True; and I am utterly stumped."

"See here, Pike; suppose the kids didn't go out of the chamber at all? None of us looked under the bed. Boys are infernal shrewd, and that rope dangling out of the window may have been all a fake."

"By Jove! there is something in that. We'll investigate it at once."

They started up the stairs, while Bob continued:

"They couldn't have got out of the yard, if they once went there, while as to re-entering the house, you will remember that the basement door was locked. I reckon we'll find them up-stairs."

"Once I get my hands on that boy," growled Pike, "I'll fix him off in a style he won't like!"

CHAPTER IX.

WHO WENT IN THE CAB?

PAVEMENT PETE was left alone. The door had closed after the men, and he was again in total darkness. His frame of mind was far from satisfactory, and for several moments he stood perfectly still. Then the burden of his disturbed mind found utterance in one brief sentence:

"The p'ison critter has locked me in!"

This was a fact; as has before been said, Pike had locked the outer door and taken the key away. Peter Deane was a prisoner in the house.

His mind quickly turned to another subject, however.

"But where is Beatrix? Great fish-hooks! I don't see where she went ter! Vanished inter thin smoke, like folks in old times, I presoom, though that idee don't hardly go down in modern times. But where is she? There was only two ways fur her ter go—up-stairs where I was, an' out o' the door where Pike's gang was. She didn't go either way, so where in time did she go? I'm goin' ter hev a look 'round here."

He had observed a gas-fixture in the hall, and as he had matches in his pocket he was not long in getting a light. It was dangerous, for if the men looked out of the chamber window they might see the light shining out; but Pete was determined to examine the basement hall.

It was of the ordinary kind, and contained only one article of furniture—a wardrobe which

set close up in the corner, and seemed to be an article banished to that region on account of old age.

Pete opened the doors, which were wholly unfastened, and the interior of the wardrobe was open to his gaze. There were shelves and hooks there, but nothing else. A mouse could not have hidden there in safety.

The Secret-Sifter had met a secret hard to sift. He kept on and looked for secret doors, loose boards and the like, but could find none. The hall seemed to be as tight and firm as such places usually are, and he was left in greater perplexity than ever.

Certainly, the disappearance of Beatrix was a very strange affair.

"I'm beat!" Pete acknowledged, woefully, as he turned out the light. "The small girl is gone, an' I ain't got the least idee whar she went to. I give it up; I reckon I'm in a bewitched house, an' the sooner I git out, the better it will suit me. Yes, that's a fack, but how be I goin' ter do it?"

He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and looked at the door which was between him and the yard in a serio-comic way.

"Can't make it, there, an' as I can't fade inter thin smoke, or air, like Beatrix did, I've got ter go up them stairs. Pavement Pete, jest as like as not you'll git inter a p'ison fix before ye git out o' this temple o' infamy. You ain't had the exper'ience of a Daniel Boone runnin' the gantlet, an' I'm afeerd you'll git awfully sot down on."

These whimsical remarks showed that Pete was in a cool mood, but he realized his danger fully. The chances were very much against his getting out of the house unseen, and Pike's temporary fancy for him had now turned to bitter hatred.

If he was captured, it would go hard with him.

"But I ain't goin' ter stay here like a rat in a trap," he decided. "I'll make a try, an' see how it'll come out."

He crept up the stairs and opened the door. The big room beyond was now wholly dark, and it appeared to be deserted. He remembered the numerous doors that led out of it, and promptly made for the nearest. Finding it, he turned the knob and pulled. It was locked. He went to the next—it was the same there. The third gave no better result.

In brief, every door in the room was locked.

Only one recourse remained, and that was to ascend still another flight of stairs. That would take him to the floor where he had first seen the men, and, consequently, into the midst of his enemies, but it was the one chance left, and some avenue of escape might be opened.

He lost no time in anticipation, but went on.

Reaching the head of the stairs he saw another door. Opening this, he had a view of the gang's main room, and two of the party were then in it. They were standing, however, and on the point of going out, and Pete waited patiently.

He had learned the arrangement of the floor well enough to be aware that, if they would get out of the way, two chances to try his luck would be open to him. By going one way he would pass into a front room; by going the other, he would have to pass the guard at the lower door. It was out of the question to think of this way, so he decided to make the best of the other.

Not long was he kept waiting. The men left the place, and then he glided into the front room.

He promptly raised a window and looked out. The street was quiet and deserted, and he was not long in deciding that he could escape. Being on the second floor he was not many feet from the sidewalk, and a convenient water spout furnished a rude ladder upon which to descend.

Acting rapidly he crawled through the window, balanced himself on the business-sign below, and then slid down the spout. His feet soon touched the sidewalk.

"Here I be!" he muttered, "but where is Beatrix? I'm pooty sure she ain't got away, an' I'm goin' fur a perleeceman right off, quick!"

He acted upon this idea, and started around the block. On the way he kept close watch for a guardian of the night, but when three sides of the square had been traversed, he had seen none. He finally turned the corner which led him back to where he started, and as he did so was treated to a sight which interested him at once.

A cab was leaving a certain building on the block, and as it rolled away, three men stood on

the sidewalk and saw it go, then they turned and re-entered the building.

"By ginger! it's them!" cried Pete.

His assertion seemed very probable. The building in question was that from which he had lately escaped, and it was very likely that the cab was the one he had, himself, ordered.

But who had gone away in it?

Pete started forward at a run, but by the time he had reached the mysterious building, he saw the folly of pursuit. The cab was rolling away at sharp speed, and with the start it had, it was not likely he could overtake it.

"An' I don't b'lieve Beatrix is in it, anyhow," he observed, critically.

He went on at a walk, but had gone only a few yards when he saw a small boy standing in a doorway. The boy was ragged and dirty, but his thin face was keen, and, whatever might have been his motive for being out, it did not appear that he was homeless or forlorn.

"Hullo!" said Pete.

"Hullo, yerself!" was the ready rejoinder.

"Hev you been standin' there long?"

"Is it any o' your affair, ef I hev?" retorted the young citizen in rags.

"Not an artom, my frien'. This hyar modern Babylon is open ter all, an' you'n me hev jest as good rights as a prince, or an express-wagon driver."

"Wal, what's eatin' ye, then?"

"Nothin'," coolly replied Pete. "None o' our fam'ly has been eat sence the whale swallowed Jonah, an' Jonah got the best o' that in the last round. But we'll let that pass. My dear sir, 'low me ter ask ef you see that cab go by?"

"I did."

"See the passengers git in?"

"Yes."

"Who was they?"

"Didn't ask their names."

"I daresay not, but you seen 'em, didn't ye?"

"Yes."

"What'd they look like?"

"I kin always see better ef I have a twenty-five cent silver-piece fur a lookin'-glass," deliberately replied the ragged youth.

"Nothin' will please me more than ter give it to ye," gravely returned Peter. "Money is no object ter me. I'm so loaded down with gold an' silver coin, not ter mention bars o' bullion, that I kin hardly move. Seven national banks, an' two manicure 'stablishments-deposit their funds in my yawnin' pockets. Feller-citizen, thar is a silver quarter. Lemme know who went in the cab!"

Pete balanced the coin on his finger, and the other boy came to business promptly. As he did not demand the money in advance, he must have had a good opinion of the Secret-Sifter.

"You want ter know who went in the cab, hey?"

"I do, my frien'."

"Two men an' a gal."

"A—what?"

"A female woman o' youth."

"You don't mean it!"

"Ef you know the story better han I do, tell it yerself!" retorted the ragged citizen.

"Two men an' a girl! Great Skipio! Say, did they all come out o' that buildin' yonder?"

"Yes."

"What fur lookers was they?"

"The men was young, an' they looked like sports."

"An' the gal—how old?"

"Eight or ten, or less; mebbe nine."

"What'd she hev on?"

"I s'pose she had on clothes, but I ain't no woman, ter go nosin' 'round an' peekin' ter see what other folks wear!" declared he of the rags, with contemptuous scorn.

"Jes' so—sartain. But did she seem willin' ter go?"

"Dunno; they brought her out in their arms. Reckon she was sick or—a pris'ner. Say, how's that silver bit gittin' along, cully?"

Pete passed over the money in silence. He now felt sure that Pike had succeeded in his work, and that Beatrix had been taken away after all. Where she could have been while she was so strangely missing was as much a mystery as ever, but that need not be speculated upon; all minor things were to be disregarded in the painful fact the girl was again in the hands of her enemies.

"Did you hear 'em tell the driver whar ter go?" asked Pete, in a hopeless way.

"Naw."

"Do you know them folks in that house?"

"Naw."

"Did you notice the number o' the cab?"

"See yer'," returned the ragged youth, "do you take me for a Vidocq? S'pose I go 'round

jottin' down numbers o' cabs, drays, hoss-cars an' ambulances? Naw, not much. Now, cully, you'd better git. I've tol' ye all I know that's true, but ef you want more, give me 'nother quarter an' I'll tell ye a fu'st-class lie."

"You look capable on't, my frien'," Pete replied, coolly, "but I think I kin dispense with the lie easier than I kin with the quarter. Besides, you might spend the money in light an' profligate amuseement, or noxious dissipation. Boys ain't what they wuz when I's young. So-long, Jay Gould!"

With this genial farewell Pete walked away. He made no effort to catch the cab, for he knew how useless it would be, but he had several facts fixed in his mind.

First, in all probability Beatrix had been taken away to a new prison, the location of which was unknown to the Secret-Sifter.

Secondly, he did not see how he was to find her again unaided.

Thirdly, he had the number of the cab he had summoned for Pike, and something might come of the knowledge.

Fourthly, the genuine Hoopendale was "in" with the gang that had done all the mischief.

"I'll go home an' sleep on't," Pete decided; "but 'twouldn't s'prise me an' artom ef I kick up a big dust ter-morrer."

CHAPTER X.

MRS. JINGLE'S LODGER.

PAVEMENT PETE was up at an early hour the next morning. He wanted to take a part of the day off, but he did not forget that two pairs of unfinished shoes were on the benches. He would not go away and leave his aged grandfather to do all the work, so he attacked the job betimes and was soon hammering away merrily.

After breakfast he and Nathan Deane resumed together, but had not been long employed when Mrs. Jingle made her appearance. The ponderous lady settled ungracefully into a chair.

"It's goin' from bad to wuss!" she lamented.

"What now, Mrs. Jingle?" cheerfully asked Grandfather Deane.

"It's about that there Jackal."

"Hoopendale?"

"To be sure."

"What about him, Mrs. Jingle?"

"Do you know how he came home last night, sir?"

"No."

"Drunk, sir—beastly drunk!" and the worthy landlady spread out her hands like two fans, to express her righteous horror.

"Ah! ah! I did not think that of Hoopendale."

"What can you expect o' a Jackal, sir?"

"So he was ree'llly drunk?"

"B'ilin' drunk, Mr. Deane, sir. I didn't see him, but I heard him. Didn't you hear him? No? That's odd. Why, 'twas enough to wake the Seven Sleepers, or a dozen on 'em, fur that matter. They way he shuffled an' tramped upstairs was shockin'. I put on my wrapper an' went out inter the hall. I didn't see Jackal, fur his disgraceful condition was hid in his room, but I seen the men who had took him in, goin' out ag'in. They tried ter smooth it over 'Mr. Hoopendale had took sick,' they said. Took sick! Bah! he'd took whisky, an' too much on't; that's what he'd took!"

Mrs. Jingle wagged her head in righteous condemnation of her lodger's evil courses.

"Hoopendale never looked like a drunkard," said Mr. Deane, regretfully, for he had a kind feeling for all.

"What kin you expect from a Jackal? I tell you, Mr. Deane, sir, that Hoopendale is bad all the way through. What is his secret? What terrible crimes lay at his door? Why has he sold his soul to a party I won't mention here? What is Hoopendale up ter?"

More ominous and ponderous grew Mrs. Jingle's manner, and she looked severely at Pavement Pete, as though she expected him to start up and oppose her.

Pete did nothing of the sort.

Since the previous evening he had been converted to the landlady's views. He, too, believed the mysterious lodger to be a man of plots and crimes. He, too, would have been glad to know what Hoopendale was "up ter."

"I'm afeerd I shall have ter order Jackal out," pursued Mrs. Jingle. "I can't have a person here ter contaminate my respectable lodgers, an' I won't."

"Perhaps Hoopendale can explain," said Mr. Deane.

"No doubt he can explain how he got drunk, but can he, an' will he, tell me how he can be two men at once, an' gallivant around, first as a big man, an' then as a little man? There are

some things, Mr. Deane, sir, that even a parson can't explain, gifted as they are above the common herd o' men—meanin' no disrespect ter you, Mr. Deane."

"I see, I see," cheerfully replied the old man. "Shoemakers are always left out o' unfavor'ble comparisons."

Just then there was the sound of footsteps in the hall, and the landlady looked out of the half-open door.

"Mrs. Plum!" she called. "Here, Mrs. Plum; come here a moment."

The woman in question entered. She was past middle age, and was a frail, pale-faced, gentle-looking person.

"Mr. Deane, you know Mrs. Plum," added Mrs. Jingle. "She's my fourth floor, front; an' as worthy a woman as I ever saw. Quiet, respectable, hard-workin'—that's what Mrs. Plum is. It is her misfortune to live on the same floor with Hoopendale, an' I'll wager something she often trembles so with fear that she can't hardly thread a needle—she's a seamstress, is Mrs. Plum," added the landlady, telling what Deane had long known.

"I am not very nervous," answered Mrs. Plum, meekly.

"But you must be afraid."

"I have never seen cause for fear."

"But that Jackal is so near you!"

"He is quiet, and has never spoken to me more than two or three times. He may be an evil man—I am not prepared to say how that is—but he has not been a bad neighbor to me. Don't think that I disagree with you, but I give him his due."

"No more than right. If there is anything can be said for Jackal, do fur mercy's sake let's say it!" exclaimed Mrs. Jingle. "Parson Georges, of the church I attend, has always told us we should speak evil o' no one, an' I never have an' never will. Scandal I abhor. Did you hear Hoopendale come home drunk last night, Mrs. Plum?"

"No. Did he?"

"Melancholy fact! he did. Drunk as a lord, or even drunker than that. Didn't you hear him?"

"No. I retired early; perhaps I was asleep."

"Well, the condition o' that man was awful: I was never so shocked in my life."

"What did he say?"

"I didn't see him."

Mrs. Plum was clear-headed enough to see the flaw in the landlady's logic, but, with her usual mild manner, she refrained from comments. Grandfather Deane, however, felt that he would prefer to have conversation run on some other subject, and he was making a few remarks on the trade of a cobbler when an apparition appeared to the persons there assembled.

This particular apparition was not of the ghostly order, but was Mr. Irad Hoopendale in the flesh. The mysterious lodger had not been heard until he appeared at the door, and his coming rather startled all but Mr. Deane. He was too incorruptibly honest to be startled easily.

Hoopendale was well along in years, and his hair and beard were very gray, but his eyes gleamed brightly under long, shaggy brows.

He waved his hand gracefully.

"Excuse me; I hope as how I don't intrude; but I wanted fur ter see Mrs. Jingle," he said, in his usual cracked voice.

"She's here, neighbor; come right in," replied Deane.

Hoopendale obeyed. Mrs. Jingle was looking at him with a stony glare, but he did not heed it. From his pocket he drew a modest little roll of bank-notes, and, selecting such as he wanted, he turned to the landlady.

"I happen ter have more money than usual, jest now," he observed, "an' as I'm too old a man ter carry much money 'round, I'll pay you a month in advance, Mrs. Jingle."

Ah! what a change went over the good woman's face. The severe expression vanished, and she became bland and smiling to an extreme.

"Jest as you say, Mr. Hoopendale," she replied, "though I know your word is as good as your money; I ain't afeerd o' losin' by you!"

And she beamed warmly upon the terrible "Jackal." Blame her not; Mrs. Jingle was human, and the power of money is felt by rich and poor alike. Mrs. Jingle's heart softened. Surely, a man who would voluntarily pay one month in advance could not be the terrible "Jackal" she had represented Irad Hoopendale to be.

Pavement Pete was not deceived, however. The Hoopendale then before them was, in appearance, manner and speech, the man they

had long known, but the Secret-Sifter did not forget that when he listened to the conversation of the two Hoopendales, in the fourth floor, back room, on the previous evening, neither had spoken in a cracked voice, nor in such a rude way. Both had pronounced their words correctly.

The boy looked sharply at the "Jackal's" hair and beard. Were they really his own, and natural? It had been Pete's theory that Hoopendale was very much younger than he seemed, in which case he must wear a wig and false beard, but Pete was obliged to mentally admit that they did not look false.

Mrs. Jingle accepted the proffered money gracefully, and her broad face grew even broader with the smile that moved it. For the time being she did not regard Mr. Hoopendale as a "Jackal," and peace reigned in the room.

Pete was glad to see that Hoopendale hardly looked at him. If, as he suspected, the second Hoopendale (or, rather, the man who looked like the genuine bearer of that name), and C. C. Pike were identical, an encounter in the house with him would be awkward, as Pete would doubtless be recognized. The boy was not quite sure which of the doubles was then present, but he did not think it was Pete.

He could hardly avoid a start when Hoopendale turned to him suddenly.

"My lad," said he, "are you busy?"

"I seem ter be," Pete answered.

"But yer shoe is 'most mended."

"Ye-es."

"Is that all you have ter do?"

"I guess so."

"I want a letter delivered to a man on East Eleventh street, an' I'll give ye twenty-five cents ter carry it there."

Pavement Pete drove in a peg with great deliberation. It immediately struck him that Irad Hoopendale was suddenly very liberal for a man who lived on the fourth floor, back. Pete knew very well that, in New York, letters dropped in a street box were only a short time in reaching their destination, yet here was a man, presumably poor, who was willing to pay a messenger twenty-five cents.

"Gran'father," calmly spoke the boy, "is thar any more dilapidated soles or heels ter keer for?"

"No, Peter; nothin' now."

"Then I shall be happy ter accept yer offer, Mr. Hoopendale. Tain't jest in my line, but the Stock Exchange don't object ter members doin' outside kermission work. I'll Kerry the letter."

"Thank ye, my lad. Here it is!"

Hoopendale passed over the letter and a twenty-five-cent piece, and Pete took them composedly, but he did not feel any great satisfaction. In his opinion that innocent-looking letter was a trap to decoy him into some trouble, the nature of which he did not know.

CHAPTER XI.

AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS.

THE mysterious lodger did not linger much longer, but said he must be at work. Trade was brisker, he added, in the toy-line, and he had all the orders he could fill. The only trouble was that pay was comparatively poor, and he found it hard to get much ahead.

And then Mr. Hoopendale went up-stairs.

Mrs. Jingle watched him out of sight. Her brows contracted for a moment, but she looked down at the money in her hands and—had nothing to say against her lodger.

Mrs. Plum arose to go, and the landlady accompanied her. The Deanes were left alone.

Pete worked away rapidly at the shoe, and soon had it finished. Grandfather Deane talked pleasantly in the meanwhile, but the boy's mind was busy. Now and then he glanced peculiarly at the letter. Was it really harmless, or did it constitute a trap, as he believed? It was addressed in a cramped, shaky, old-fashioned hand to "James M. Taggart." Pete did not know who this person was, but a mental vision of C. C. Pike flitted before him as he looked at the address.

It seemed almost impossible that the conspirators could so soon have learned that he was dangerous to them, and solved his identity, but he was very suspicious.

Perhaps, if he delivered the letter, he would at once find himself a prisoner.

When he left the house he went at once to find Jakey Strauss. His young friend had not been out of bed long, and looked duller and more sleepy than usual.

"Hi, there, Jakey, be you all ready?" Pete asked.

"Ready for what?"

"Police Headquarters. You know Jan Jung is ter meet Halpin thar, this A. M., an' hev it settled whether he's Daniel Markin, or not."

"I don't know."

"Wal, we'll find out by goin'."

"Be you intrested, Peter?"

"I be."

"Den I goes along, though I had 'most forgot-ten dot mans."

"You slept too hard, Jakey; that's what's the matter. Great care wants ter be took on this subjick. Ef you's ter prop yer eyes open when ye go to bed, you wouldn't find no sort o' trouble."

Jakey looked at him in bewilderment.

"Vot I prop dem open mit?" he asked.

"A cinder from an engine is pooty good."

This remarkable assertion confused Jakey more than ever, but Pete gave him but little time to think. Getting his young companion in motion, they marched off toward Police Headquarters. There was no time to lose if they wanted to keep the appointment.

The Central Station is situated on Mulberry street, just north of Houston, and is a rather grim-looking edifice. It has not the frowning, forbidding aspect possessed by the Tombs, which is certainly gloomy and awe-inspiring enough to frighten a timid criminal into a fit; but law-breakers usually find the Central Station ominous enough to fill any long-felt want.

As chance would have it, the boys encountered Edmund Halpin and a party of friends on Mulberry street, and they had no trouble in getting inside.

Jan Jung was there already, accompanied by the detective who had taken up his case the previous day, and a more downcast, melancholy-looking person it would have been hard to find than the foreigner.

Inspector Byrnes was not present, but an assistant gave prompt attention. He told how he had been made a dupe of the Florida land-swindlers, and ended by asserting that Halpin was Daniel Markin, but his manner was no longer confident. Halpin then presented his side of the question. He denied being Markin, and brought forward the witnesses to prove what he said.

Fortunately for him, these witnesses were men not to be doubted, and it was easily proved that Halpin had been in Connecticut at the time the bogus land-office flourished on Houston street.

Halpin was told that he could go, and Jung's detective companion did not say a word against it. He had, however, something else to say.

"Mr. Jung is very anxious to know if there is any news of his stolen daughter," he announced.

"Nothing has been reported here," was the reply.

"It is a very odd case."

"Haven't you formed any theory as the motive for the abduction?"

"No. The child is less than ten years old, and as Jung is very poor, we can't see any object in stealing her."

The detective in charge looked sharply at Jung.

"No money in the case, eh?"

"No, your Honor."

"Have you an enemy here?"

"I never in my life had an enemy, unless the man who sell me Florida land as a swindle hate me for it," the Hollander asserted.

"He may have been the guilty person, but I fail to see how he is to benefit thereby."

"Ah! he is wicked—very wicked."

"Such things are common in New York. The number of scoundrels who get a living by preying on their fellow-men would, in themselves, make a good-sized city. But that fact don't explain why your girl was stolen. There was a motive for it. Come, sir, stir your thoughts and see what cause exists!"

Jung shook his head hopelessly.

"I know nothing of it," he persisted.

"Then we will leave cause and go to effect. The girl is stolen, but we will do our best to recover her. I will put a special detective on the case, and I think we can soon solve the mystery."

The interview lasted for some time longer, but nothing of importance was developed. Jung was finally conducted out by his kind detective friend, and Pete and Jakey went with them, but once on the street the boys went their own way. Pete led the way up Mulberry street, but at the first stationery store, stopped and purchased a sheet of paper and envelope.

Supplied with these he led Jakey to a deep doorway, gave him a pencil and said:

"Write as I direck, my frien'."

Jakey looked bewildered, but obeyed without argument, and Pete directed as follows:

"Ef you want news o' the missin' Beatrix Jung, it are possible I kin put you on the track. Thar is a house at"—here he gave the street and number where he had had his adventure the previous night—"that is open ter suspicion o' the wu'st sort. It seems ter be only an innercent factory, but is, reelly, the headquarters of a gang o' p'ison rascals. You'll do wal ter look inter this. One on 'em is named C. C. Pike. I hev reason ter b'lieve Beatrix was tooken there right after she was stole, but she was tooken away ag'in in a cab 'bout midnight. This epistle is from a well-wisher an' heavy real estate owner—no, Jakey, don't put in about the real estate. That ain't so, an' this hyar letter is all solid facks."

The letter was duly finished and signed. Pete was at first inclined to make the signature "Constant Reader," after the fashion of newspaper correspondents, but finally decided upon "Kritikel Observer," as he pronounced it. He then surveyed the letter "kritikelly."

"You sling ink pooty wal, Jakey. Quite a scholarly hand and I don't remember seein' nobody that could dot their t's an' cross their i's better nor you do. Keep on in yer meteoric career, Jakey, an' you'll git ter be a corner-groceryman, or somethin' ekully brilliant. Now back it ter the detective we talked with at the station."

"What! you ain't goin' ter send it, are you?" asked Jakey, in open-eyed astonishment.

"I be."

"But they'll give you fits."

"That's all right, Jacob."

Jakey was too dull to consider that, the letter being in his writing, he might get into trouble, but Pete had considered that. There was very little danger that anyone would connect Strauss with the matter in any way, while he might be suspected. Hence, the effort to hide his part of it by having Jakey write the letter. As to Pete's motive for revealing a part, only, he had a strong desire to keep up his efforts to "sift" the secret alone, but he felt that it would not be right to keep the police ignorant of what he knew.

When the letter was posted he gave his attention to another letter—the one he had engaged to deliver for Irad Hoopendale to Mr. Taggart, of East Eleventh street.

"This is a corker!" commented the boy, as he gazed at the superscription, and, indeed, he did not know what to do with it.

Was it an ordinary letter or a decoy?

"I'm half-inclined ter tear it open an' see what's in it," he added; "but the glue is dry, an' I couldn't hide my work, nobow. I'm goin' ter d'liver it, an' face the racket, though I s'pect I'll git inter some p'ison fix. My idee is that C. C. Pike is onter me; an' that he's laid a trap, an' is now waitin' at East Eleventh street ter gobble me up—layin' fur me like a spider fur a fly. Pleasant prospect, by gum!"

Nothing could dampen Pete's good-humor, and, serious as he regarded the case, he made a humorous grimace. Then he turned to his companion, who was looking contemplatively at a sugared cake in a baker's window.

"Jakey!"

"Yah!" said Jakey, mechanically.

"We part here."

"Where you goin'?"

"Out on the war-path, Jacob, ter throw my hull weight ag'in the enemy, an' crush 'em by the preponderance o' my corporal avoirdupois, accumulated muskle an' polyglot subterfuges. Understand?"

"Mein gracious, no!"

"Didn't s'pect you would. The dangers o' the case show up more clearly ter me than they do ter you. Never mind, Jakey—ef I'm cut off in the flower of my youth, you'll heave many a sizable sigh. Go home, Jacob; farewell!"

With a tragic gesture Pete stalked away, leaving Jakey dumfounded and perplexed.

"S'pose I ought ter give Jakey some idee o' the case, so he could tell me about it ef I don't show up; but Jakey's head can't bear too much," muttered Pete. "I'll go it alone, sink or swim."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SOUNDS UP-STAIRS.

WALKING rapidly, Pavement Pete drew near East Eleventh street. On the corner of the block where Mr. Taggart was supposed to live, the messenger met a big, red-faced, jolly policeman, who looked capable of handling a small regiment of rascals, and for a moment Pete's resolution wavered. Would it not be wiser, after all, to make a confidant before going into

a house from which he might not come out alive?

It would, certainly, have been wiser, but Peter Deane did not do it. He had made up his mind to risk it all, and he held to his purpose doggedly.

He went on and approached the house.

It was not a favorable-looking place. It was old and weather-beaten, and not one of the blinds was open. Even at first glance it suggested dark secrets, and things to be concealed behind closed doors and windows, but Pete was not to be frightened.

He rung the door-bell, and the call was answered by a morose-looking woman, who had but one good eye.

"Mr. James M. Taggart in?" asked Pete, briskly.

"Yes," was the curt reply.

"I want ter see him."

"What's your business?"

"Be you Mr. Taggart?"

"Of course not, you impudent—"

"My business is with the aforesaid Mr. T., exclusive."

Pete displayed the letter, and the woman, giving him an angry glance, stepped back.

"Come in," she said, in a surly voice. "Go in there."

She pointed to a door at one side.

"Now for it," thought the boy.

He entered the room, and found himself in an ordinary parlor. No one was present, but a man soon made his appearance from the hall.

"What is it?" he asked, brusquely.

"I've got a letter fur Mr. James M. Taggart."

"I am he."

"This letter is the other him in the case."

Pete passed it over with a bow. He did not look for a trap as much as he had done. Taggart was short and crusty, but he did not look like a villain, while the fact that he was in the front parlor made the Secret-Sifter somewhat confident of his ability to escape if mischief was intended.

Taggart read the letter, and Pete, watching, saw an angry flush overspread his face.

"What in the furies does this mean?" he asked, in a loud, excited voice.

"Dunno. What does it say?"

"Who gave it to you?"

"Irad Hoopendale."

"Who is he?"

"He lives in our house, an' makes toys."

"I should say so. Somebody has grossly insulted me. This letter offers to make me images of 'Mother Hubbard and her dog,' and of 'Cinderella,' and other trumpery for my children, and I am a bachelor. Make toys and images for my children! Why, I hate children."

The irate gentleman glared fiercely at Pete.

"That's queer," observed the boy, in real perplexity.

"This insolent person writes just as though I had consulted him, by letter, regarding his terms for making such 'historic figures,' as he calls them, and he has the impertinence to give me his prices for a dozen lots of the same sort. The scoundrel! I wish I had him here!"

The irate old bachelor almost foamed with rage.

"Who is the ruffian?" he added.

"Dunno, only that he lives in our house, an' makes sech figgers."

"It is a deliberate insult to me. He says he awaits my reply, the villain! Well, he shall have it!"

Pen and ink were on the table, and Mr. Taggart hastily dashed off these lines:

"I never heard of you or your diabolical 'figures' before. You claim to have received a letter from me. I never wrote one to you. If I hear any more from you I will have you arrested."

He flung the letter at Pete, and added:

"Take this back to the infamous wretch! Good-day."

The Secret-Sifter understood that he was dismissed, and he promptly left the house and started homeward.

"Wal, that sort o' yanks the caramel," he observed aloud, as he walked westward. That gent seems ter be in dead 'arnest, an' I allow that he ain't in with the gang. What the dickens does it mean, anyhow? Has somebody played a trick on him an' Hoopendale, knowin' Taggart was an old bachelor? Guess that's it—no; that theory don't suit me a tall; it don't explain why Hoopendale sent me with the letter at the expense o' a quarter, when he could 'a' sent it by mail fur two cents."

The Sifter rubbed his nose thoughtfully, and then decidedly added:

"Thar's some noxious scheme in it, an' Hoop-

endale is the chap that's at it. The hull job was a fake, an' Mrs. Jingle's lodger had some ax ter grind, but I admit I don't see the p'int."

Meditating much on this new phase of the case, Pete went directly homeward.

He did not feel satisfied with what he had done to put the police on the track of Beatrix. His letter had been vague, and it had been anonymous—a fact sufficient in itself to condemn it. The police might investigate, but they were not likely to show much zeal. Jan Jung was mourning for his daughter, and the girl was in the hands of evil persons.

"Which leaves my duty plain," was Pavement Pete's ultimatum. "I've got ter go ter the perleece an' tell all I know, an' I'll do it afore I go ter bed; but, fu'st o' all, I'll go home an' d'liver Hoopendale's letter to him."

He glanced grimly at the note. Taggart had written the answer on the margin of Hoopendale's own letter, and it was very much to the point.

Reaching the house, he at once ascended to the fourth floor and knocked at the door of the rear room. It was opened by the toymaker himself, and the old man seemed to be in a very pleasant mood.

"So you're back, my lad?" he said.

"Most o' me is, though it's a wonder," Pete answered, grimly.

"How so?"

"Taggart wa'n't in a mood fur orderin' figgers. Mebbe his children had sorter harassed him by rood an' uncivil disobedience. But here's his epistle."

He passed over the letter, and Hoopendale, after some trouble, found the answer on the margin.

"Dear me! how's this?" the old man asked, in what seemed great surprise.

"Did he order many gross?" grimly inquired the boy.

"I don't understand it at all," and Hoopendale read the note in his cracked voice.

"It's simple as pie. Taggart is a batcheldoor, an' he don't want no toys until he has some children. He was mad as a wet hen in November 'cause you insinuated he had writ ter ask yer prices."

"But I did receive sech a letter."

"He didn't write it."

"Dear me! that is too bad. I thought as how I had a chance ter make some money," and the toymaker seemed to be greatly disappointed.

"I'm sorry for ye, neighbor Hoopendale; I be, by jinks!" quoth Pete, with equal depth of feeling.

"Some trick, I see."

"That's my idee; thar's a trick som'ers."

Pete could not avoid a significant tone, but Hoopendale did not seem to notice it. He kindly dismissed his late messenger, and Pete went to his grandfather's room. The old gentleman was reading a newspaper.

"No more shoes come in?" asked Pete, after a few trivial remarks.

"Not yet; but I don't know but Mr. Hoopendale has gone inter the cobblin' business."

"How so?"

"He's been poundin' a good 'eal up-stairs lately."

"Sence I went away?"

"Yes."

"What was he doin'?"

"I don't know, Peter."

"What did it sound like?"

"He seemed ter be nailin' somethin' up. Perhaps he was boxin' up some o' his images ter send ter his customers."

"We never heerd him box up, any before, did we?"

"No."

Grandfather Deane was reading while he talked, and did not seem much interested; but it was different with Pete. He was all interest—more, he was excited. It impressed him as odd that this pounding had taken place at that particular time. Had he been sent away so he would not hear it?

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOX TO BE SENT BY EXPRESS.

THE more Pete meditated on the case, the more suspicious he became. Hoopendale had occupied the room just above them for a long time, and had never before been heard to nail up his images in a box. Once or twice Pete had seen the mysterious lodger carrying out parcels, and Mrs. Jingle had reported numerous other cases, but all had been comparatively small bundles, done up in paper.

Pete could not help thinking that fresh mischief was going on up-stairs, though what it

was he did not know. He did, however, believe that he had been purposely sent away so that he could not hear the sounds.

To make this theory plausible, it was necessary to infer that Hoopendale knew that Pete was a dangerous enemy, and the boy believed that Pike had recognized him and sent word to Hoopendale.

The result had been—the bogus errand.

But what had Hoopendale been doing? What did all his hammering indicate?

Pete was puzzling over this when a timid voice sounded at the half-open door.

"Are you busy, Mr. Deane?"

The cobbler and Pete looked around and saw Mrs. Plum, the seamstress, who lived on the fourth floor, front.

"Not at all," genially replied the old gentleman.

"Pray come in, Mrs. Plum."

The widow obeyed, and accepted the chair indicated by Grandfather Deane.

"I wanted to consult you, sir," she continued.

"Happy to oblige you, ma'am."

"I have been doing some sewing for a lady in the town of Whately, Massachusetts. She is to be married soon, and I have made her wedding garments. They are done, and I have to-day nailed them up in a box, ready to send by Express, but I don't know what company to send by. Can you tell me?"

"Wa-al, I don't know much about that part of the country, but it's either the American or Adams Express. I re'lly can't say which, but your best way is ter ask at one o' the offices. They will give ye all the p'int."

"Will they send a wagon here for the box?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thank you, Mr. Deane; I will do as you say. I have had a good deal of trouble nailing up the box."

"Why didn't you send fur me, ma'am?"

"Oh! I didn't want to trouble you."

"I wouldn't have been no trouble, ma'am; I'm always happy ter oblige the ladies," declared Mr. Deane, with his friendly politeness.

The seamstress asked a few more questions, and then went up-stairs.

"A fine woman!" observed the cobbler; "a very fine woman. Somewhat shy, an' too meek ter git along well in this world; but—a fine woman!"

"Did you hear her hammerin'?" asked Pete slowly.

"I guess 'twas her, not Hoopendale, that I did hear, though I thought 'twas him. Land sakes! Peter, she must 'a' put an awful lot o' nails inter that box."

"How so?"

"I judge by the length o' time she kept up the hammerin'. She must 'a' 'bout filled it full o' nails, but then, women don't understand 'bout such things. They think a good many nails is needed, an' half o' what they drive don't hit the mark. This ain't ter be considered derog'tory ter women, Peter, fur they are charmin', all on 'em."

The old gentleman talked on blandly, but Pete's mind was more usefully employed. Another person had fallen under his suspicion, and that was the seamstress.

Mr. Deane had readily accepted the explanation of the hammering, but had unconsciously thrown discredit on the theory by admitting that a good deal of pounding had been done for such a small task.

Now, it seemed very absurd to suspect meek Mrs. Plum of anything wrong, but when suspicion is once started, there is no end to the phases it will assume. Pete suspected Mrs. Plum, and he found what he regarded as a confirmation of his ideas in the fact that the seamstress had always spoken well of Hoopendale.

"She's in the ring!" thought the Sifter decidedly.

Just then there was the rustle of a dress, and Mrs. Plum passed the door with her street garments on. She was going out, probably to see the Express company's agents. Pete saw this and quickly arrived at a conclusion.

He would go out, too.

There was no need of words about the matter, as there were no shoes to be repaired, so he quietly put on his hat and left. As on the previous occasion, when he followed Hoopendale's double, he went out by the basement and took sundry precautions, but Mrs. Plum did not look behind her once.

Her manner, as she walked down the street, was as quiet and retiring as ever, and Pete's confidence was somewhat shaken, but it revived when he saw that she did not go toward the Express Office to which she had been directed.

Instead, she went as directly as possible to the corner of Broadway and Great Jones street. At

that point she turned to the right, and the Sifter quickened his pace so as not to lose her. When he reached the corner he saw her walking away with a man, but the couple paused at that moment, and both gave him a profile view of their faces.

An important discovery followed.

Pete knew the man—it was C. C. Pike!

The Sifter smiled joyfully. All his suspicions had received confirmation, and he no longer had the least doubt. Starting upon the frailest of clues he had suspected Mrs. Plum, and as she had evidently come there to meet Pike, she could no longer be regarded as anything but an ally of the gang.

"I'd 'most as soon s'pected my gran'father!" thought Pete, bewildered by the importance of the discovery. "She has played her keerds right wal, fur I never saw so meek a woman before or sence."

A burly patrolman walked past with a slow, ponderous tread.

"He don't know what's up," muttered the boy, "an' I sha'n't tell him. I'm goin' ter sift this secret all alone, an' ef I kin make a success on't, mebbe I'll get app'inted on the perleece force o' Newark."

Mrs. Plum and Pike talked for several minutes. It was plain that their business was not of a trivial nature, for their manner was earnest. Pete regretted that he could not get near enough to overhear what they said, but it was out of the question.

At last Mrs. Plum gave her companion a small parcel she had carried half-concealed, and then the interview came to an end.

The woman retraced her steps, while Pike went the opposite way.

Pete allowed Mrs. Plum to pass him, keeping out of sight in the meanwhile, and then the pursuit began again. She went toward home, but stopped at the Express Office and left an order for them to call for a box the following morning.

Returning to Prince street, she went to her room, while Pete also settled down at the home base. He had not yet seen the police, and was reluctant to do so at that stage of affairs.

He felt that he would like to pass a few more hours in investigation on his own hook.

Nothing further of interest occurred for several hours, and the day ran along until night drew near. Grandfather Deane had gone out, and Pete was alone in their room occupied in going over the case for the twentieth time, trying to find the correct explanation.

That Hoopendale and Mrs. Plum were the allies of the mysterious gang was now plain, but Pete did not understand the situation up-stairs.

According to his theory he had been sent away in the morning so that he would not hear the hammering. What was this hammering which they were so anxious to keep secret?

The explanation of Mrs. Plum was not satisfactory. If she had been boxing up wedding garments, as she stated, it would have required but little hammering. The boy believed that box to be as big a humbug as was the letter to Taggart. He did not even believe that Mrs. Plum was a sewing-woman. If she was an ally of Pike's band, she could earn a living easier.

As to the box if she had really made a wedding outfit, why did she not hurry it along to its destination? Going to the Express Office at noon she had said, "Come for the box to-morrow," yet she had represented to Grandfather Deane that it was all ready to send.

"The box is a humbug!" Pete decided; "and it don't explain the cause o' the hammerin'. What was that fur? Mrs. Jingle's noxious lodger ain't g'n me any money as a salve ter my mind, an' I ain't no cause ter be biased, an' coaxed over, as she has been. I don't see no good in Hoopendale, an' I b'lieve he's been up ter some p'ison mischief in his room on the fourth floor, back, while I was away."

As the last words passed his lips—for he had half-unconsciously spoken aloud—he suddenly sprang to his feet.

"Hullo! what was that?" he added.

It had been a sound from the floor above, but what had been the nature of it was another question. To Pavement Pete it had sounded very much like a cry of pain or alarm, but it had been so indistinct that he was by no means sure of it.

"Mebbe Hoopendale an' Plumy has got inter a fight," he muttered, but this view of the case was by no means convincing.

Then another sound reached his ears. What was that? It was like the indistinct crying of a child, and Pete made three long steps and tore open the door. He hoped to hear clearer, but

nothing rewarded him. The house was as silent as ever.

"But I heerd a child cry out," Pete persisted, as though arguing the case with some one, "an' then it fell ter cryin'. May have been one o' the Bushgreen kids, down below—but it sounded up above!"

The Sifter turned his gaze suspiciously toward the fourth floor.

What was going on up there?"

"Hoopendale an' Mrs. Plum ain't fathers nor mothers, an' ef any child is cryin' up thar, what child is it?"

CHAPTER XIV.

HOOPENDALE GETS OUT OF PLACE.

PAVEMENT PETE ran lightly up the stairs. He had had an idea so sudden and startling that it put him in a most excited mood for the time being. He hastened to the top of the stairs, and then, glancing alternately at the doors leading to Hoopendale's and Mrs. Plum's rooms, listened eagerly.

All had grown silent. The crying of the child was stilled, and he could not hear even the sound of a voice. He advanced close to Hoopendale's door, and then to that of Mrs. Plum's room, but without result. He believed both to be in, but there was now nothing to indicate the fact.

Pete retreated half-way down the stairs and, crouching in the darkest place, waited and watched. Time only served to increase his belief that the crying sound had come from above, and there were only two rooms there.

What could a child be doing in the room of either Hoopendale or Mrs. Plum?

What child could be there?"

There was a startling suspicion in Pete's mind, and he was eager to solve it. It had flashed upon him that Beatrix Jung might be in a new prison, and that prison be on the fourth floor, with the couple above as jailers.

Believing that both were now in the same room he was watching for proof, and for whatever other discoveries he could make.

The minutes wore away, but there was no sign of life on the fourth floor. His hearing was strained to the utmost, but not a sound could he hear. The sobbing child had become silent, and the occupants of the upper rooms did not stir enough to make themselves noticeable.

Were they really there? This now became an important question. The Sifter had believed that both were in, but he grew doubtful after awhile. His line of reasoning was not exactly logical. He wanted to gain view of the rooms, and with this prevailing idea in his mind, he accepted the silence as proof that they were not there.

His desire to look further became a passion.

He could not forget the sobbing child. Perhaps Beatrix was really there. She had been taken to a new prison; and Mrs. Jingle had stated that Hoopendale had come in intoxicated the previous night, being helped in with a good deal of shuffling by other men.

Perhaps those men had brought in, not Hoopendale, who had never been known as a drunkard, but little Beatrix.

And the mysterious hammering! By surmising that Beatrix was there, and that Hoopendale had been making safer arrangements to keep her, the hammering could be explained easily.

There was little wonder that Pete grew excited and became painfully anxious to look into the rooms, and as the suspense grew prolonged and more painful, he determined to make an effort. Night had not yet fallen in the streets of Gotham, but in the upper hall of Mrs. Jingle's house, lighted as it was only by a scuttle above which was none too clean, there was more of night than day.

This was in Peter's favor, and he determined to make the effort.

Once more ascending the stairs fully he went to the door of Hoopendale's room. He passed considerable time listening, but as nothing was to be heard, he at last ventured to open the door.

He half-expected to hear Hoopendale call out, but silence reigned. He slowly put forward his head and gained the coveted view. In the room the light of day was still strong enough for all practical purposes, and it needed only one glance to assure him that the man was not present.

On the table were three or four of the images which he professed to make, but this did not incline Pete to more lenient feelings. The room had an attraction for him, and he would have been glad to enter and look it through, but

something which met his gaze taught him caution.

Carelessly thrown upon the faded old lounge he saw Hoopendale's hat and coat, and he was shrewd enough to draw a conclusion from this. Their owner was not far away.

This conclusion disturbed the Sifter, and he felt that he had not yet fully grasped the situation. Where was Hoopendale, and what was he doing?

Clearly, it was best to be cautious.

He closed the door softly, and then approached Mrs. Plum's door. Voices! Yes, at last he had the clew. Conversation was going on in there, and though it was in a low tone, he recognized the voices as those of the self-styled seamstress and Hoopendale.

Pete did his utmost to overhear what was being said, but without success. The voices were so subdued that he could distinguish no sentence, nor gather what was the subject of conversation.

This continued several minutes, and then all sounds ceased. The Sifter waited patiently. Suddenly there was a heavy sound in Hoopendale's room, as though something had been let fall accidentally. Pete changed his position again.

Some one was walking in the old man's room! The discovery was amazing. Only a little while before the boy had satisfied himself that the room was vacant, yet strong steps now sounded there—evidently those of a man.

Had Hoopendale returned? If so, how had he come?

Pete meditated, and then went down to the third floor. He and his grandfather occupied two rooms, one being a "hall bedroom." On a line with their main room was another large one, at the front, this being occupied by a man and his wife named Bellows. Between these two large rooms were two closets, one for each room.

Entering the closet belonging to his grandfather's part of the house, Pete began an investigation. He wished to learn if there was any way of entering the front room through it. Believing that the floor above was arranged just the same, he was curious to know how Hoopendale could go from his room to Mrs. Plum's without entering the hall.

A short search showed him that there was no such way on their floor, the intervening wall being of firm boards.

Determined to settle the point, he descended to the kitchen where Mrs. Jingle was ironing.

"Hard at it, I see," quoth Pete.

"I be, that."

"Tain't many women that's as good workers as you be, mum."

"I know it, Peter."

"You ought ter be rewarded."

"Parson Georges says as how a clear conscience is the best reward, an' I guess he's right. The parson always is right."

"Yes, but you don't need much advice from anybody. Your head is a clear 'un. I think so, an' gran'father says it."

"Thank ye, Peter!" returned the landlady, beaming with pride.

"Dunno but I shall hev ter hire out as an ironer, ef cobblin' don't pick up. I'd like ter see more biz fur gran'father an' me, fur it would fill a long-felt want. Tell ye what, Mrs. Jingle, I'd jest like it ef we had enough trade so we could 'ford another room—take a floor right through."

"That would be fine."

"I s'pose in that case you could cut right through the closet, an' hev a connectin' door between the front and rear rooms, eh?"

"I should be willin', but it would depend on the landlord. I don't own this house, ye know."

"Be any of your floors connected that way?"

"No."

"I never hev been 'round on the top floor," added Pete, slyly.

"Dear me! if there was a connectin' door there, poor Mrs. Plum wouldn't sleep one wink; I know she wouldn't. With that there Jackal in the next room, life would not be safe."

"Then their closets are tight an' close, jest like them on gran'father's floor?"

"Jest the same."

"An' no way ter pass from one room to another?"

"Only by the hall."

"Wal, it ain't likely gran'father an' I'll git trade enough ter hire another room, anyhow."

Pete had learned what he desired, and he made some trivial excuse for having visited Mrs. Jingle, and then returned to the Deane rooms.

One thing was settled—mischief was going on in the fourth floor rooms. Mrs. Jingle to the contrary, there was a passage between Hoopendale's and Mrs. Plum's rooms. That they had themselves made it was evident, and it was a part of their efforts to carry on their villainy successfully.

Perhaps it was the making of this new passage that had caused the hammering, but Pete suspected that the passage was nothing new. He had another theory in regard to the hammering.

He had not forgotten the cry, nor the sobbing of the child, and he felt positive that a child was then up-stairs. Hoopendale and Mrs. Plum were the allies of Pike, and Pike had been the captor of Beatrix Jung.

The more the Sifter considered the matter, the more he believed that Beatrix was up-stairs, a prisoner in the closet between the two rooms.

Deliberation showed Pete that there was only one thing for him to do. He could not very well rescue her alone, and as further delay would be wrong, he decided to go to the police at once and tell all that he knew.

He arose and put on his cap, and then started from the house. Night was no longer delaying its advance, and the hall was quite dark, but as he met some one there he readily recognized a young fellow of about his own years who lived on the same block.

"Hullo, Pete!" saluted the new-comer. "I was lookin' fur you. I've got a letter for ye."

CHAPTER XV.

JAKY MAKES A BAD BREAK.

PETE looked at the speaker in momentary surprise, for he was not accustomed to receive letters, but he soon recollected that his dignity was at stake, as a person of business and social importance, and he replied in a careless way:

"A letter for me, hey? Wal, how many more will come ter-day? You ought ter see the pile up-stairs, Patsy."

"B'en puttin' in an 'ad.' fur a job?"

"Me? Not much! This is either from my girl, or Jay Vanderbilt, or it's an invite to Mrs. Van Trunk St. McCarty de la Stovenbopper's *bon-ton ne plus* what d'ye-call 'em soiree."

"Gammon!" quoth Patsy, and then he passed over the letter, wheeled and went out.

Pete shook his head gravely.

"I'm afeerd I'll have ter fall on Patsy an' chastise him, yit. I can't 'low my dignity slurred, an' a sassy boy I detest. But who's this from?"

He opened the envelope and found the missive very brief.

"PETE:—Meet me at O'Quaffin's corner as soon as you can after you get this. I have something of importings to say. JAKY STRAUSS."

"Wal," observed the Sifter, "I'll be chawed up ef Jakey ain't gettin' high-toned, an' took ter writin' notes promisc'us. I'm afeerd I set him a bad egg-sample by dictatin' that one ter-day, an' what makes it all the wu's is the p'ison way in which he spells importance, in this screed. Jakey must go ter school another term. Meet him? Wal, yes; it's right in my course, an' I'll see what my rotund frien' wants."

Pete went out and walked lightly down the street, softly whistling a popular air. Mr. O'Quaffin kept a store on a neighboring corner, and toward that point the Sifter was bound. He had forgotten his transient curiosity to know what Jakey wanted, and was thinking of his intended visit to the police.

Would they believe him and take steps to investigate Mrs. Jingle's lodger at once?

As he neared the corner he saw Jakey standing with his hands in his pockets, and at once approached him.

"Wal, my b'loved frien', what is it?" Pete asked.

"Did you get my letter?"

"Rawther! Why didn't you send a telegraph?"

Pete smiled on the fat boy in his humorous way, but the smile suddenly vanished. Something flashed down over his head, and he found that useful member enveloped in a blanket, while stout arms grasped him from behind and raised him from the sidewalk.

The Sifter was as brave as any boy, and when he realized that he was entrapped by enemies he made a desperate effort to release himself; but he had been taken wholly by surprise, and his strength did not amount to much then—he was in the grasp of those far stronger than he.

Almost as quick as the proverbial "twinkling of an eye" he was bundled into a hack which had stood by the curb, and he realized that abduction was intended. He tried to cry for help, but the blanket prevented any sound—indeed, it was pressed so tightly against his face that he could hardly breathe.

Anon he realized that the vehicle was in motion, but the strong arms around him did not relax their grasp, nor did breathing become easy enough to please him.

He escaped suffocation, and that was about all that could be said.

Several minutes passed in this way, and then the hack came to a stop. The blanket was thrown aside, but the Sifter's first view was by no means reassuring. He found a revolver presented to his face.

"Be silent!" commanded a stern voice. "If you utter a cry it will be at your peril!"

Pete looked gravely around. Besides himself, Jakey Strauss and three men were in the hack, and they had apparently come to a halt in a stable.

"I'm mum!" agreed young Deane.

"Oh! oh!" lamented Jakey, "vat vas der trouble? I shall be kilt of myself. Vat I done dot you take me away like dose ways?"

"Dry up!" was the curt reply.

Somebody opened the hack-door, and the party alighted. As Pete had thought they were in a stable, and as the outer door had been closed, it was very much like a prison.

No hope of escape there.

Jakey Strauss was a badly frightened boy, and huge tears chased each other down over his fat cheeks, but the Secret Sifter retained his coolness well. They were in for the adventure, whatever it was to be, and no good would come of lamentations.

Close at hand were stairs which led to the loft, and they were at once conducted there. It was a big room, the full dimensions of which the faint, sorrowful-looking lamp did not reveal, and bales of hay were scattered around in a way more or less orderly.

Jakey suddenly burst out in tumultuous weeping.

"I didn't do it on purpose, Peter!" he sobbed. "Dey vooled me pad, and made me tink dere vas no harm. Don't blame me v'en I vas dead."

"Oh, hush up!" ordered one of the men.

"My kind frien'," quoth Pavement Pete, "it may be obtrusive fur us to speak our leetle piece here, but it sorter strikes me that Jakey an' me are int'rested. What fur are we thusly tore from the bosoms o' our families?"

"You'll soon learn."

"Go on an' s'plain."

"Don't be in a rush."

"Dey gives me a quarter of a tollar to write dot note to you," sobbed Jakey, "unt dey said it was all a shoke. I know not dot they was meaning mischief like dis."

Pete was worried and chagrined, but he knew better than to blame his young friend. It was plain that the men had taken advantage of Jakey's simple mind.

The Sifter had a pretty clear idea what all this trouble meant, but he was not surprised when another man came up the stairs and revealed the face of C. C. Pike.

He smiled in a disagreeable way.

"So you have bagged them."

"As you see."

"Did the mayor's plan work well?"

"To a charm. Both boys fell into the trap at the first trial."

"We meet again," continued Pike, addressing Pete.

"No great honor ter me," the Sifter retorted. "You have now seen the folly of opposing your slow wits to those of longer heads."

"Thank you fur nothin'."

"You've got yourself into a fix by meddling with what was none of your business."

"The perleece will help me out."

"They won't find you."

"Four on 'em are keepin' me in sight all the time. You'll be raided hyar, my gay crook, an' git inter a noxious fix."

"We'll look out for that. I want to talk with you alone. Come this way."

Pike grasped Pete's arm and led him to where the light from the lamp fell full upon the boy's face. The latter at once recognized this fact, and wondered if it had any significance.

"Well, you cut up a pretty racket last night, didn't you?" continued Pike.

"You didn't seem ter ketch me."

"I've caught you now."

"An' you'll hold me 'bout as wal as you did last night, cap'n."

"What have you done with the girl?"

Pike bent his gaze more keenly upon Pete's face, and the latter suddenly comprehended why he had been led to the lamp-light. The man was anxious to know if Pete suspected where Beatrix was.

"Ain't got her," the Sifter replied, composedly.

"You took her away from our quarters last night."

"Gammon!"

"What's that?"

"You know better."

"I know you took her out of her room, and then you got away."

"Jes' so. She's stoppin' with the Gov'nor o' the State o' New York, U. S. A., jest at present."

"I see you are a hardened liar."

"A boy who wouldn't lie ter you would be a poor, no-count sort o' a pork-eater."

"You are altogether too impertinent, but I will find a way to break your spirit. You have meddled with what don't concern you, and you will now reap the consequences. We are honest, law-abiding men, but when we are misused we are bad men to fight against."

"Draw it mild, boss," coolly advised the Sifter.

Pike lifted his hand and seemed tempted to strike the fearless boy. Pete had been taught to show respect to deserving persons, and he always tried to do so; but when he was opposed to such a man as Pike, his ready tongue did not allow him to be far behind in a discussion. If Pike thought of striking his prisoner he changed his mind. He lowered his hand and turned away.

"Tie up the young cubs!" he ordered.

This order was promptly obeyed. Cords were at hand, and the boys' wrists were bound and the prisoners then secured to posts at the further end of the loft. The men then retired to consult. They seemed to have something upon their minds, for their manner was earnest.

"Peter!" called Jakey, in a low, mournful voice.

"Yes, my frien'?"

"What are dey going to do mit us?"

"I dunno, Jacob, but ef you keep sharp watch, you'll prob'ly find out."

"I wish I vas at home."

"Ef you kin break yer engagement with these chaps, I advise ye ter go."

"I think I can get mine hands loose."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then git them loose, right off, quick. Great jumpin' kangaroos! yes; yank 'em out o' yer bounds ef ye can, ef ye take off yer finger-nails doin' it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A LITTLE EXCITEMENT IN THE LOFT.

PETE had no very clear idea how they were to be helped by getting out of their bonds at that time, except his active mind might find some extemporaneous aid, but he spoke so eagerly that Jakey bent himself to the task. He had only just begun when Pete spoke again.

"Let up an' look innercent!" he quickly directed. "His nibs is comin' ag'in!"

It was Pike to whom he referred. That person came forward with a business-like air.

"Boy," he said, imperiously, "we want the whole truth from you."

"Do ye? Haven't got a bit on't, yerself, have ye?"

"Stop your impertinence. What we want is a plain talk. We know as well as you do that you have stumbled onto a part of our secret, and I run no risk in saying that I am the party once known as Daniel Markin, he who sold the Florida land to Jan Jung. I caused his daughter to be stolen. Now, of course you have given the police an account of how you found the girl, and then lost her, last night. But we are in the dark as to what the police now know. Are they on our track?"

Pete saw a chance to do some tall romancing, and he prepared for a plausible story.

"D'ye s'pose I'm goin' ter give the snap away?" he asked, taking care not to be too hasty.

"You are not in a position to choose."

"Eh?"

"We can compel you to talk."

"How'll you do it?"

"Come, now, no bluff. You are only a boy, while we are several men. Don't compel us to use undue force; I say this for your own sake. As far as we are concerned, we had just as soon wring your neck, so to speak, as we would a chicken's."

"Don't ye do it, mister; I wear spurs seven inches long, tipped with darnin'-needles."

"Your ridiculous talk will do you no good. Perhaps you can help yourself by talking sense."

"Will you let me go ef I speak out?"

"No."

"Then how do I gain anything by talkin'?"

"We have a large quantity of horsewhips

about the premises. You can escape them by doing as we wish, but if you are obstinate, we shall use them upon you."

"Hold up, thar!" exclaimed Pete, feigning alarm. "Don't yer hosswhip me!"

"Will you talk?"

"What d'ye want ter know?"

"What are the police doing in this case?"

Pete shifted his position uneasily, and his face assumed a sullen look. He wanted Pike to believe that he spoke most unwillingly.

"The perleece are up an' doin'," he finally said, sulkily.

"What are they doing?"

"Fur one thing, they have a sharp eye on the house whar I live. Three on 'em are watchin' it all the time."

Pike looked flurried.

"Why are they watching there?" he asked.

"I dunno, only I heerd one o' the cops say the seat o' the diffikilty was thar. Dunno jest what he did mean."

"Who put the men there?"

"Inspector Byrnes."

Pike hesitated, and the troubled expression deepened on his face. It was clear that Pete's little fiction had had even greater effect than the most sanguine mind could expect. The schemer looked absolutely startled, and he suddenly wheeled and walked toward his companions.

"Mein gracious, Peter!" exclaimed Jakey, "vat dose bolicemen watch our house for?"

"Jacob, curb yer abnormal curiosity. You shouldn't give way ter sech weaknesses. Be you still able ter git your fists out of them cords, ef I tell ye?"

"Yah."

"Wal, don't be in a rush; don't give the snap away. Stand right whar you be, an' look as sheepish an' forlorn as you kin. The times ain't ripe fur a break yet."

The Sifter looked at their captors with a good deal of interest. The men were in earnest consultation, and it seemed as if all had been a good deal stirred up by the latest news. Pete smiled grimly. He had chosen his subject well, and it was not strange that they were alarmed to hear that the Prince street house was "shadowed" by three officers.

The discussion lasted for some time, and then all except two men left the loft. Among those who went was Pike, and Pete surmised that he was going to "look to his fences," and mend possible breaks. Those left behind were stout, evil-looking fellows, who plainly were of a low walk in life, but up in the first class in viciousness.

They rolled a bale of hay near to the lamp, secured two broken chairs, produced a pack of cards and began to play some game.

No attention was paid to the young prisoners; the men evidently trusted implicitly to the ropes and did not consider it necessary to trouble themselves further.

Pavement Pete's gaze wandered about restlessly. Captivity did not agree with him. Wherever Pike had gone, matters would probably be worse when he returned, and it would not be healthy for the boys to be there then.

Was escape possible? Several things served to show that the stable did not stand on any street, but, on the contrary, was situated back in a yard, so it was not likely that any outcry would be heard by honest men.

Pete did not think of making any such outcry. He had always been compelled to rely on his own efforts, and he expected to do so now. If escape could be brought about, it must be through some plan laid then and there.

He had not forgotten Pike's reckless confession of his identity, and it was recalled by the sight of a small, neat tin sign, which lay among other rubbish at one side.

"DANIEL MARKIN,

AGENT FOR FLORIDA LAND."

This little sign had been Pike's whole stock-in-trade when he blossomed out in New York as a land-agent, but it had been a bait sufficiently alluring to draw at least one poor fellow into the net.

"Oh, if I could only git to the perleece now!" thought Pete. "I've got this case all sifted, an' what I could tell would wind up this noxious gang instanter."

He gave a wrench to his bonds, but they were firm.

Believing that they would have no better chance than then, he looked around and arranged a plan; and then he turned again to Jakey.

"Now fur biz, my frien'. We'll git out ef

we can, but b'ar in mind that it must be done tremenjous sly. Don't let them critters suspect. Be you on?"

"Yah," replied Jakey.

"Then onfasten yer wrists."

Jakey had made no idle boast when he declared that he could release his hands, and he proved it by doing so in a very short time.

The Sifter's eyes glittered with pleasure.

"Now git out yer knife an' cut yer other bonds."

This was done.

"Now cut mine."

Jakey proceeded to obey.

The Sifter breathed a sigh of relief as he found the power of locomotion once more his. He did not know how long it would remain so, but he hoped for the best. Thus far the men were unsuspicious. They were talking busily, and Pete found their words of interest.

"Do you s'pose Pike will fix it up all right?" asked one of the twain.

"I hope so."

"Do you understand why this Jung girl is kickin' up such a row?"

"Money in it."

"But I thought her father was mighty poor?"

"So he is, but the gal has had money left her. Her mother was rich, an' it was a runaway match when she cottoned on ter Jung. Now the old lady is dead, an' the gal is heir to the boodle in Holland. The next heir is a chap who is also in New York. Wal, the mayor proposes ter hold ter the gal an' bleed the next heir, an' ef he won't pay, why we perdooce the gal an' 'arn our boodle thar. See?"

"Yes."

So did Pavement Pete see—at last. Now if he could get away he had the whole case in his own hands.

"What's trumps?" asked one of the players.

"Hearts."

"Let her go, Gallagher!"

Peter Deane was not interested in "trumps," though he had need to play trumps of another kind. He dared not delay longer, and the next thing was to get out of the corner where they stood.

Of course all of this required care, and even slow-witted Jakey developed the necessary qualities, but the men did not look around. Believing the prisoners to be firmly bound, they continued their game and gave thought to nothing else.

Both prisoners were at last free from bonds, but they were by no means "out of the woods," or out of the loft, and the card-players were between them and the stairs.

Escape by that course was out of the question.

Pete's mind was directed to another quarter. Not far away was a window, dust-covered and cobweb-strung. Out of this the Sifter hoped to go. With a last direction to Jakey he dropped on his hands and knees, and Strauss did the same. Whether they could reach the window unseen was a question. Part of the way scattered bales of hay would act as shields, but, as a rule, there was no cover whatever.

The venture was begun.

Inch by inch Pavement Pete crept along, his gaze all the while fixed upon the men, and Jakey followed as well as he could. He was never intended for such work. His fat body was not easy to manage, and the Sifter was alarmed by the amount of noise Jakey made. Fortunately the card-players remained oblivious to what was going on.

A few seconds more and the goal was won; Pete rose to his knees, put out his hand and touched the window. Was it movable or not? Perhaps it was fast, in which case hope would go out like a candle.

He pushed gently.

Hope flashed up brightly when the window slid up with remarkable ease and lack of noise, and Pete, looking hurriedly out, saw a shed, the roof of which was only a few feet below.

All at once there was a stir from one of the men.

"Hullo! whar does that wind come from?" he asked.

He turned his head and saw the boys.

A wild exclamation fell from his lips.

"Jump, Jakey—jump!" cried Pete.

Jakey had risen to his feet, but in the face of danger like that he was like one paralyzed and incapable of motion. This was not the case with Sifter, and with a quick motion he forced Strauss through the window. The shed was only a little below, and no harm could come of it.

The men were rushing forward, but just as

one reached out to grasp Pavement Pete, the latter leaped out of the open window at one bound.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FINAL SIFTING.

TRIFLES often turn the whole current of affairs. Pete and Jakey were on the roof of the shed, but were still dangerously near their enemies. They gained a reprieve through a circumstance no one had foreseen.

When Pete had passed out of the window he released his hold on the sash, which at once fell. At that moment the foremost pursuer had his arm outstretched to seize the Sifter, and in a moment more he found his hand pinned under the falling sash. For a few moments all of his warlike zeal was gone, and while he was dancing with rage and pain, Pete urged Jakey forward, and both sprung off of the shed.

The Sifter saw an alley ahead which looked as though it might lead to the street, and he grasped Jakey's arm and hastened that way. They heard the window open once more before they were out of the yard, but it was too late to catch them.

They ran out to the street, and as a car was passing, Pete thought there was no better way to get out of sight than to ride.

When their pursuers emerged from the alley they looked all around without making any discovery. The escape had been perfected.

Pavement Pete's mind was busy. Plainly, the time had come when prompt action must be taken in the case he had been "sifting." He was at first inclined to go to Police Headquarters, but thought better of it, and finally decided to take the quickest course and go to the station where he was known. Just as they were leaving the car, however, the chances of the evening took a new turn.

On the sidewalk Pete saw Jan Jung and the detective who had been working for him.

The boy hastened to the officer's side.

"Say, mister, I'll bet a cent I know whar she is!" he exclaimed.

The detective looked at him in momentary surprise.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" he finally said.

"Sure pop. Say, Jan Jung, did yer wife hev rich relations?"

"Ahl! yes. She left them for me, and poverty, it have follow where I go!" lamented the Hollander.

"Cheer up, commodore! Money has been lef' yer darter, an' that's why she's stole, but I guess I've got the thread ter the biz. I've been siftin' it."

"What's all this?" asked the detective.

Pete hurriedly explained what was necessary. The officer watched him sharply. It was a remarkable story for a boy to tell, but he decided that full reliance was to be placed on what Pete said.

"So you think Hoopendale has the girl?"

"I do, fur sure."

"We'll test it right away. Come on!"

The detective set his face toward Prince street, and they walked on briskly. Before reaching the house, the detective enlisted two men who often helped him, and they and Jung were smuggled into the basement, and then taken quietly up to Grandfather Deane's room, care being taken not to attract attention. Mr. Deane looked surprised at this invasion, but he welcomed all with his usual kind manner.

"Is Hoopendale in?" asked Pete, after a few general remarks had been made.

"Yes; he just went up-stairs—or one of him, as Mrs. Jingle would say."

Pete looked at the detective.

"S'pose I go up too, an' investigate?"

"Go on," the officer answered, "but be careful. Don't be discovered."

"What is this?" asked Grandfather Deane, in bewilderment.

"We will explain very soon, sir."

Pete slipped out of the room and quietly ascended the stairs. By the time he reached the top he became aware that an animated conversation was going on in Irad Hoopendale's room. The Sifter crept to the door and listened.

"If any one had been watching the house, I should have known it."

It was Hoopendale who spoke, but not in the cracked voice known to the dwellers in the house.

"The boy seemed to speak the truth."

Pavement Pete started. The second voice was as well known as the first; it was that of Pike.

The rescue party had come just in time.

"I'll call in Meg," continued Hoopendale. "She has the front room, you know, and very little escapes her sharp eyes."

"I will go in, too."

There was a brief pause, and then the voices sounded in Mrs. Plum's room. Pete promptly changed his position.

"I have seen no one," the self-styled seamstress was saying. "I believe the boy lied."

"But there must have been something in what the boy said," persisted Pike. "I think we had better take the girl away from here to-night."

"And get caught in trying?" asked Hoopendale.

"Can you suggest a better way?"

Pete did not wait to hear the suggestion. He went quietly away, descended the stairs, and was soon in the Deane room again.

"Cap'n," he announced, addressing the detective, "all is ready fur your scoop. The gal is there, an' so is Pike an' Hoopendale."

"What have you heard?"

The Sifter briefly described the conversation, and the officer delayed no longer. He led his force up-stairs. The plotters were still in Mrs. Plum's room, and the detective's first step was to get the key of the toymaker's room and lock the door, thus cutting off retreat that way.

This done, he took his turn listening to the conversation. It was very compromising to the plotters, for, beyond the references to Beatrix, the fact was established that Pike and Hoopendale had run the Florida land-office together, and that Mrs. Plum was the step-mother of Hoopendale, and a life-long ally of law-breakers.

These points learned, the detective unceremoniously opened the door.

A more complete surprise it would have been hard to give them, and even Pike seemed incapable of action. The detective knew how to take advantage of such dazed moods, and he had irons on both men before they realized their danger fully.

Pavement Pete gave his attention elsewhere, and hurried to the closet. As he suspected, a passage had been cut through, nor was this all. One of the closets had been transformed into a room, ventilated by a hole in the wall, and as Pete tore open the door, out came Beatrix.

Jan Jung gave a great cry, and rushed forward and clasped his daughter to his arms.

"I live again!" he cried; "I live again!"

"We're all pooty lively jest now," commented Pete, nodding his head abruptly. "As usual, wickedness only prospers fur a season, an' it seems ter me them noxious scamps are in a p'ison fix. It looks bad fur them, now the case is all sifted!"

Pavement Pete's prophecy proved true. Hoopendale and Pike were hopelessly in the toils, and were found to be old offenders. Hoopendale was a young man, really, and it was because his disguise had, at times, been used by Pike, that good Mrs. Jingle had got the idea that her lodger was a man with two bodies. The quarters on the fourth floor had contained a good deal of thieves' plunder, first and last, and Mrs. Plum was as bad as any of the men.

These three persons belonged to a regular band, the leader of whom was called "The Mayor" by his allies. The new revelations resulted in breaking up the band, and when Hoopendale, Pike and Mrs. Plum were sentenced to prison, several of their associates went the same road.

The money Pike had secured from Jung for the bogus Florida land was recovered and given to the Hollander. The alleged fortune in Amsterdam was found not to be a myth, and as Beatrix's maternal relatives were anxious enough to see her to forgive her father for the runaway match, father and daughter sailed for Holland.

Beatrix had not been harmed during her captivity, and she explained a fact that had caused Pete much perplexity. He had never been able to surmise how she had disappeared in the basement, during the night of their mutual adventures, but the explanation was simple.

There was a hidden door in the back of the wardrobe, which was fast to the wall, and there connected with another door which led to a room beyond. Beatrix had been seized by an old woman employed in the house and taken through, thus falling into the hands of her enemies again, and greatly puzzling her young champion.

Pavement Pete received great praise for his work as a "Sifter," and grateful Jan Jung made him a really fine present of money. Pete is still to be found with his grandfather, and is always ready to help honest folks, and to sift out the plots of rascals and bring them to grief.

THE END.

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